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THE BLUEPRINT OF REFORM, SOCIAL JUSTICE QUESTIONS, AND THE  
MISSING PERSPECTIVE OF AFRICAN AMERICANS

RAYMELLIA JONES  
NATIONAL LOUIS UNIVERSITY  
DISSERTATION

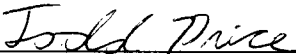
THE BLUEPRINT OF REFORM, SOCIAL JUSTICE QUESTIONS, AND THE  
MISSING PERSPECTIVE OF AFRICAN AMERICANS

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of  
Doctor of Education  
in the National College of Education

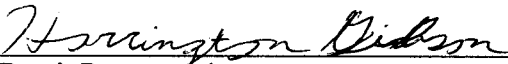
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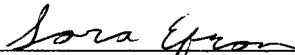
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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

Forty years ago, where I lived on the south side of Chicago, my siblings and I attended the same neighborhood Chicago Public School (CPS) as my parents. There were neither White, Hispanic, nor Asian students. All the students were African American. My teachers were White, and few were Black. My mother would tell us that she didn't trust CPS to properly educate her children. The school was plagued with disinvestment. My younger sister was an academically gifted child, and without the options of sending her to a better school, my mother would visit our neighborhood school to inquire about a more rigorous curriculum and books in an effort to nurture my sister's talent to no avail. Therefore, in addition to attending my local neighborhood school, my parents homeschooled my siblings and me. My dad would buy us books about civil right leaders and would have us read and give oral reports about them. I asked my mother why she felt that it was necessary to homeschool my siblings and me and send us to school. She responded, almost in an apologetic manner, "The schools in the Gardens (the place where I lived) were not giving you what you needed to compete in the world. I didn't want you to be like me. I wanted you to have options" (personal communication, 2013).

What is ironic is that just north of my home in Chicago was a suburban school district that had a reputation of being one of the best school districts in the country. I have since been on a journey of inquiry and research to examine what policies contributed to my public school education. As I studied the current state of inner-city schools and the policies that generate them, I noticed that the characteristics of these school, are reminiscent of the same characteristics of my public school education in Chicago 40 years prior.

## **Research Questions**

The primary research questions that will be addressed in this dissertation will be:

- What were the education policies 40 years ago that created inferior schools?
- How was my race related to the school that I attended?
- How are current education reform policies related to race?
- How are these policies creating segregation and inferior schools for African-Americans and people of color today?

The purpose of this essay is to provide a historical background of Chicago's restrictive housing policy and the subsequent development and maintenance of segregated schools. Then, by exploring the tenets of critical race theory, I analyze how education policy is related to race by examining research in regards to the inferior education of African Americans and people of color in the United States. I use my personal lived experiences, via an autoethnography, to expound on how my education intersected with the policies and economics of the time. As the reader will discover, it is not the argument of this essay that discrimination ended with school integration but that failing schools are the result of racial inequality in segregated schools and caused damage to Black students.

## **Problem Statement**

If policy makers and educators continue to ignore the historical evidence that current school failures are entrenched in a system of racial inequality, subsequent misguided policies that fail to include a civil rights component will support the continued educational detriment of African American and children of color (Orfield, 2013).



Given the nature of this situation, the literature in this essay focusing on housing and public school education in Chicago shows a legacy of racism and segregation that was pervasive not just when I was in school in the '70s and '80s, but throughout the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century. A significant number of studies document the genesis and growth of unequal conditions for predominantly African American communities in both in detail.

**African American population.** To understand my experience in the Chicago Public School system in the years between of 1974 to 1989, the reader must comprehend the historical significance of Chicago's restrictive housing policy. In the 1920s, most of the Black population resided in a concentrated part of the city, a span of 30 blocks known as the Black Belt. Later, due to an immense Black migration from the South in the 1940s, the Black residents grew in Chicago to account for a quarter of the city's whole population, and consequently, it posed a problem for White resident communities (Danns, 2002).

**Housing, segregation, and covenant agreements.** As the Black population from the South continued to migrate to Chicago, the Chicago School Board changed boundary lines to preserve segregation of school districts (Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007; Orfield, 1978, 1996). A Harvard professor and expert of segregation policy in America, Gary Orfield (1978, 1996), provided a historical, documented account of federal government agencies openly supporting housing segregation.

**Overcrowded and underfunded schools.** Black schools became overcrowded and grossly underfunded (Danns, 2002; Herrick, 1971; Orfield, 1978, 1996). Mary Herrick (1971) was a Chicago school teacher who documented school board meeting for the span of 50 years, from 1929 to 1970. Her work is valuable to this study as it provides firsthand accounts of

historical data and school board policies. Herrick (1971) reported that in 1961, the typical Black school averaged more than 42 students per classroom compared to White schools, which averaged 32 students per classroom. More unconvincing federal mandates were issued to integrate schools, but the school board did not make sincere efforts to integrate schools (Slaughter, 1967).

By examination, the school board policy not only segregated Black students from White students, thus providing an unequal education, but it also intentionally discriminated against Black administrators and Black teachers (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Herrick, 1971). Although the students were segregated by race since post-World War I, it is important for the reader to note that the Chicago School board employed few Black teachers and administrators even in their own communities (Danns, 2002; Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007)! Simply put, Black teachers were not widely employed in Chicago Public schools, thus Black children were mostly educated by White teachers. This presented a problem for many African Americans. Some resented integration with Whites altogether (DuBois, 1933/2002; Shujaa, 1996). W. E. B. Dubois (1933/2002) wrote that integration would be racial suicide for the Black community, referencing the removal of Black educators from the Black community, leading to the subsequent oppression and discrimination of Black children.

**Choice and failure.** The Civil Rights Act of 1964 set a time limit on states to integrate schools or have federal funds withheld. Prior legislation merely required states to form an integration plan, but states found loopholes, such as White transfer and public school closings, in an effort to avoid school integration, so choice historically was related to segregation. As Orfield (2013) points out, by 1968 the South had more integrated schools for African Americans than was sustainable, and this continued until 2004. Yes, the Southern states that were

documented as racially divided became integrated before Chicago Public schools! This was mostly due to the restricted housing segregation policy in Chicago. Other factors include drawing school attendance boundaries, transfer policies, and assigning teachers in a segregated way (Orfield, 1978, 1996, 2013). The Chicago school board circumvented federal mandates to integrate because they claimed to be operating neighborhood schools, but the neighborhood boundaries were drawn and changed even as the neighborhoods changed to preserve racial segregation of schools (Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007; Orfield, 1978, 1996, 2013).

Most Americans think that choice is a basic human right that holds true for all Americans. Yet this study will reveal that it is not true. As Orfield (2013) points out, students are assigned to a public school and are not given the option to choose one of the best options available. My mother defied the education system in that she required that I attend my local public school, but in addition, my mother choose to homeschool me, and for a brief time of financial success, she enrolled me in a private school. Her resistance saved me and my siblings.

Gary Orfield's (1978, 1996, 2013) work was used in this essay because he has primary documentation on school integration and federal policy as it related to not only my experiences, but also to children across the nation. He served as director of the Harvard Project on School Desegregation, and he and Susan E. Eaton traced the legal history of desegregation as it relates to policy and ideology. What makes his work valuable to this essay is that his former work on segregated schools, national policies, and the reversal of *Brown versus Board of Education* (1978, 1996) have been brought together with his most recent research regarding school choice and civil rights (2013). The reversal of *Brown versus Board of Education* has created the same problems for African Americans that existed for me 40 years ago. These changes are most noticeable in choice policies.

Sociologist Kathryn M. Neckerman's (2007) work is also crucial to my research. Her work proved to be a powerful tool for this essay, as it addresses what had been ignored by many sociologists. A director of the School of Social Sciences at the University of Chicago, Neckerman analyzed the educational experiences of African Americans in Chicago and their subsequent status in American society. By further analysis, in the African American and White-immigrant communities in Chicago circa 1930-1947 education was tied to class distinction within the community in relation to White society. Yet unlike White immigrants, Black elites were banded from assimilation.

**Social and political ideologies.** There are strong opposing views regarding failing schools. The charter school movement and the philanthropists who support it have ideologies that contend that schools are failing due to factors related to teachers unions and public governance. They contend that schools can be improved in a market of choice. The theory of choice further claims to expand opportunity for children who are locked in inferior schools. Based on this argument, any solution other than public governance would solve the ills that plague our schools. Bill Gates donated significant sums of money to this cause. *The Blueprint for Reform the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2010* was written by President Barak Obama and the Secretary of Education. This federal document supports charter schools and market of choice theory and was an appeal for the country to take an active role to equally educate all children. In truth, there are advantages to charter schools, especially those that are grassroots organizations. Nonetheless, most charter schools have not shown significant improvement in student performance (Frankenberg, 2010; Neckerman, 2007; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013).

In this study, I reference the work of William Watkins (2012) and Pauline Lipman (2011) and highlight the discourse related to the charter school movement and how African Americans and other people of color have been disenfranchised by powerful politics and corporate funds operating in the name of equality. Both William Watkins and Pauline Lipman are professors at the University of Illinois – Chicago. Watkins served in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and Education, and before his untimely death, he was steadfast in the social justice movement and wrote many books and publications related to social justice in education. Pauline Lipman is professor of Educational Policy Studies and director of the Collaborative for Equity and Justice in Education. She is not only a teacher and researcher, but also an activist for justice and liberation.

### **Significance of this Study**

Why is this important? The controversial topic of education and race is at the center of debate in lieu of current school reform efforts. Disputes related to student achievement, segregation, re-segregation, and choice are shaping history. Moreover, education policies are developed from ideologies of powerful people. Unfortunately, key components are missing in the ideology of these policy makers: the experience of someone who was educated under a racially motivated system of inequality and the history behind failing schools. I contend that if policy makers and educators continue to ignore the historical evidence that current school failures are entrenched in a system of racial inequality, subsequent misguided policies that fail to include a civil rights component will support the continued educational detriment of African American and other children of color (Orfield, 2013).

## **Methodology**

My research is a qualitative study with a design approach in the form of auto-ethnography. Creswell (2013) indicates that when researchers conduct qualitative research, they embrace multiple realities with the intention of reporting these multiple realities. This is evident when the researcher presents the different perspectives of individuals. In addition, knowledge gained in a qualitative study is learned via the subjective experiences of people's lives. In addition, Creswell defined an autoethnography as "multiple layers of consciousness, vulnerable self, coherent self, critiquing the self in social context, the subversion of dominant discourses, and the evocative potentials" (p. 73). In my research, I include personal narratives, essentially a counter-story of school policy. I reveal my perspective as an inner-city, African-American student attending Chicago Public Schools and the larger cultural meaning of my experiences outside of school. The use of narratives (counter-stories) presents a different interpretation of the law as Delgado indicates (as cited in Parker & Lynn, 2002). More importantly, narratives are used to justify an ideology of racism and permit the listeners to see the world through the perspective of someone at the bottom of the law (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Critical race scholars Laurence Parker and Marvin Lynn (2002) suggest that story telling "constitutes an integral part of historical and current legal evidence gathering and findings of facts in racial discrimination litigation" (p. 10). By telling my story, as Matsuda (1987) points out, stories of victims (as was I under school policy) are valuable under Critical Race Theory because the experiences are connections from the past and demonstrate how the tiered relationships of power protect Whites over people of color (Parker & Lynn, 2002).

In this essay, I will reference the personal communication of my mother to examine my personal path in public schools in Chicago from 1973-1989 and the realities of the socio-

economics of that time. I convey my personal communication with my mother, who had not only been a former Chicago Public school student during the civil rights era, but also she had been a parent volunteer in the public school for several years. Her historical memoirs provide the reader a lens to an inner-city African American parent's perspective on inequality in the urban schools of the time.

I briefly highlight Washburn Trade School (my father was one of a selected few Black students who attended Washburn) in my literature review. A Chicago Public School, Washburn was at the center of union and racial debate in the 1960s, and my father's experiences echo the realities of the time. It is important to mention that, of truth, the stories my father had shared with me about his experiences in Chicago Public schools during the civil rights movement lay the foundation of my inquiry. I must confess that I did not fully grasp the validity of those stories, as those stories of racial tensions had not become my story until it was my reality.

**Theoretical lens and research design: Critical Race Theory.** Because my research focused on the theme of education, race, and inequality, the foundation of my work is framed in a Critical Race Theory (CRT) epistemology. A great contribution to this research was the work of Dixson and Rousseau (2006). Dixson is a professor in the School of Teaching and Learning at the Ohio State University. Rousseau is a professor in the Department of Instruction and Curriculum Leadership at the University of Memphis. Their work was valuable to this essay as it set a frame for me to analyzed urban school development from a critical race lens.

Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) work was also significant to this study as it accomplished what educational research had ignored, and that is, theorizing the concept of race in qualitative research. As Ladson-Billings and Tate suggest, race is so rooted in the daily discourse of American life that it is more on display than it has ever been. The argument

presented by CRT theorists is that the paradigms of race have been combined with ethnicity, class, and nation because race has not had priority in social sciences (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Winant, 1993).

In addition, I employed the work of Parker and Lynn (2002), as I owe a debt to them for their work on defining the theoretical framework of CRT within a socio-historical context. I use their work as I sought meaning to my experience in education. They define CRT as a “legal theory of race and racism designed to uncover how race and racism operate in the law and in society” (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 7). The pioneers of CRT, Derrick Bell (1988) and Richard Delgado (1989), were attorneys who argued that racism could not be viewed merely as acts of individual prejudice because historical and ideological choices suggest that race is a pervasive part of American life. As such, the historical consciousness and ideological choices have “directly shaped the U.S. legal system and the ways people think about the law, racial categories, and privilege” (C. Harris, cited in Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 9). Furthermore, Cheryl Harris (1993), a critical race legal attorney and professor of law, published an epic work for the *Harvard Law Review Journal*. Her work “investigates the relationship between concepts of race and property and reflect on how rights in property are contingent on, intertwined with, and conflated with race” (Harris, 1993, p. 1914). Harris contended that the law failed to recognize the system of racial domination connected with White privilege and property rights. She posed the argument that White racial identity evolved into a form of property historically, and presently, as such it is protected in American law (Harris, 1993). Nonetheless,



Some argue that poor children, regardless of race, do worse in school, and that the high proportion of African American poor contributed to their dismal school performance (I believe that the cause of their poverty combined with the condition of their schools and schooling is institutional and structural racism. (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 575) Crenshaw (as cited in Dixson & Rousseau, 2006) clarifies that while race appears to be neutral, the system creates the illusion that racism is no longer the primary factor responsible for the Black underclass; instead, the disparities in the Black class are consequences of individual and group merit in a supposedly equal system. The Chicago Public School board continued a system of segregation to maintain an unequal education system (Herrick, 1971). This system subsequently deprived African Americans of better jobs and provided them with higher-priced housing.

**Conflict approach to education (neo-Marxist approach).** In addition to CRT as a framework for this study, I reference the issues of (poverty) social class. I use the work of Lauder and Halsey (2006) to show how there are systematic differences for chances of students from working-class social backgrounds to obtain professional jobs. Moreover, these barriers are secured to prevent social mobility. This is referred to in this essay as reproduction of social class.

**Research design.** My research design is in the form of autoethnography. According to Creswell (2013), an autoethnography is defined as “multiple layers of consciousness, vulnerable self, coherent self, critiquing the self in social context, the subversion of dominant discourses, and the evocative potentials” (p. 73). I connect my personal experiences with the cultural, social, and political climate of the time.

**Research participant and site.** In this study, I explore my personal lived experience as a student in Chicago Public Schools and personal communication with my mother Elaine Lee. I

chose to explore my personal experiences because it examines a history of problems in the education of urban African Americans and marginalized people in American society.

**Source of data and method of data analysis.** In this research, I use my personal lived experiences, personal communication, and observations with my mother. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) point out that there are multiple layers of interaction that the researcher herself cannot observe. Furthermore, I give reference to historical data collected from the review of literature regarding policy and structural racism.

**Validation criteria and researcher's self.** In this research, I reveal layers of my conscious thoughts and my personal communications with my mother. In addition, the stories of my father, were personal communication via my father and myself, are retold to me by my mother as my father is deceased. As I wrote previously, it is because of my father's stories, that I am a researcher today.

## **The Plan**

In the next section of this research, I provided the reader with a historical origin of Chicago Public Schools and the role of racism. I used the words "Blacks," "Negroes," and "African-American" interchangeably based on how people were socially identified during various times in history. I revealed this history by first explaining the role of discrimination in Chicago's restrictive housing policy that lead to the subsequent development of segregation in schools. I provided evidence via Supreme Court rulings, federal and local investigations, school reports, scholarly work, and newspapers that illustrated how housing segregation was a mechanism used to implement school segregation and the subsequent inequality in education. I then identified components such as overcrowding schools and stratification of curriculums within the school system that created barriers for Black children and other children of color. I

addressed the current school reform efforts and highlighted how the current system had been maintained due to the history of racial inequality and discrimination.

I explored the issue of urban education and race via critical race theory, but I also highlighted the socioeconomic theory of the Neo-Marxist. Later in the section, I referenced the charter school movement and the efforts made by advocates of charter schools and corporations to provide equality to students in Chicago. I examined how corporations are similar to the civic elite who had been a driving force in the origin of Chicago school policies. Finally, I reflected on how education policies and laws are reflective of how segregation in education has not improved in fifty years.

The literature focusing on housing and public school education in Chicago shows a legacy of racism and segregation that was pervasive not just when I was in school in the '70s and '80s, but throughout the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century. A significant number of studies document the genesis and growth of unequal conditions for predominantly African American communities in both in detail.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

This is a disturbing thing. I have been in many demonstrations all across the south, but I have never seen even in Mississippi and Alabama, as hostile and hate filled, as I have seen in Chicago.

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Chicago Tribune*, August 5, 1966

To comprehend my experience in the Chicago Public School system in the years between 1974 and 1989, the reader must grasp the historical significance of Chicago's restrictive housing policy. The United States Supreme Court decision of 1896, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, explicitly approved segregation by government. The policy being that schools and housing could be "separate but equal," *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954), was the major legislation supporting educational equity (Dixson, 2011; Orfield, 1996). Despite legislation, as the Black population expanded pre-World War I, the City of Chicago enforced a restrictive housing policy to maintain racial segregation of Blacks and Whites (Herrick, 1971; Orfield, 1978, 1996; "Union controls Chicago school board," 1940). By 1917, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the local ordinances regarding housing. However, in the 1920s, most of the Black population resided in a concentrated part of the city, a span of 30 blocks known as the Black Belt. Due to massive Black migration from the South in the 1940s, the Black population grew in Chicago. Eventually it accounted for a quarter of the city's whole population, and consequently, it posed a threat to White resident communities (Danns, 2002). It is estimated that the Black population grew from 44,000 to 234,000 from 1910 to 1930 (Neckerman, 2007). When Black families tried to move into White neighborhoods, they were confronted with violence. A race riot erupted in 1919 that included a week of street fighting over housing and jobs, leaving nearly 40 residents dead and 100 injured.

## **Housing, Segregation, Schools, and Covenant Agreements**

As the Black population from the South continued to migrate to Chicago, the Chicago School Board changed boundary lines to preserve the segregation of school districts (Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007; Orfield, 1978, 1996). A Harvard professor and expert of segregation policy in America, Gary Orfield, provides a historical, documented account of federal government agencies openly supporting housing segregation. Orfield (1996) concluded that, “The entire system of housing segregation was one of government sponsored segregation and a denial of even ‘separate but equal’ opportunity for minority families” (Orfield, p. 395). Accordingly, during the Depression era, federal housing and local officials adopted and enforced racial practices. For example, covenants were written in property deeds that restricted sales of property to Blacks and other minorities. Although the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed racial zoning in 1917, at the same time it authorized court enforcement of the covenant agreements. With the government supporting segregation, this practice imposed a pattern of extreme segregation on Blacks in Chicago (Orfield, 1978). In addition, another study by Allan H. Spears (1967) found that:

The development of the physical ghetto...was not the result chiefly of poverty; nor did Negroes cluster out of choice. The ghetto was primarily the product of white hostility... As Chicago Negro population grew, Negroes had no alternative but to settle in well-delineated Negro areas. And with increasing pressure for Negro housing, property owners in the black belt found it profitable to force out white tenants and convert previously mixed blocks into all-Negro blocks. (p. 26)

Moreover, another study by Clements E. Vose (1959) specifies a description of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s legal campaign against covenant

agreement. The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders Report (1967) implicated all levels of government in supporting housing segregation (Orfield, 1978). Thus, the housing segregation policies in Chicago pre-dating World War I contributed significantly to the development of school segregation in Chicago. In his 1978 book, *Must We Bus*, Gary Orfield wrote an analysis of desegregation of the five largest cities: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit. He wrote, “Chicago has the most segregated school system of any of the five cities. Mass mobilization against segregation came relatively late, but at its peak the struggle had a cast of characters and a sense of confrontation that were probably unsurpassed” (p. 158). The Federal Housing Authority (FHA) contributed to the housing segregation policies in Chicago by refusing to insure projects that had “inharmonious racial groups” (Vose, 1959). In addition, Black families were priced out of the private housing market. Another racist practice used in Chicago was redlining. Local real-estate agencies would literally use a red pen and outline on a map where financing for housing and further investments were withheld (Neckerman, 2007).

### **Denial of Racial Exclusion**

Because of the racially divided city, it was inevitable that schools would be segregated. In fact, this was how the school board avoided federal mandates to integrate. Unlike Jim Crow laws that explicitly enforced racial segregation of schools, Chicago Public Schools were considered to be color blind, and school policy did not overtly include racial exclusion as law. School officials would mask racial practices, but the actions of the Chicago School Board were equally detrimental to children of color (Neckerman, 2007). Therefore, in defense of not integrating, the board claimed that neighboring White schools could not accommodate more students. They further justified their actions by claiming that White and Black residents chose to live separately,

and therefore, the schools were simply a reflection of the natural selection of the neighborhood. These claims were not true because of the restrictive covenant agreements that confined Blacks to the Black Belt, subsequently barring them from White neighborhoods, and redistricting practices implemented by the school board.

In addition, racial discrimination was evident district wide in Chicago schools. First, Blacks did not have representation at the school board (Herrick, 1971). For instance, whereas there had been Polish, Jewish, and other White immigrant groups that had representation at the Chicago School Board since 1896, there were no Black representatives for the board until 1939 (Neckerman, 2007). Second, there were significant barriers for Black professionals to be hired as teachers. As is stated elsewhere in this essay, although the schools I attended from 1974 to 1989 had mostly Black students, there were few teachers who were Black and even fewer who were administrators. This was not because there was a shortage of Black educators. Neckerman (2007) points out that a large number of Black men and women attended the Chicago Normal School for teaching and graduated, but they were denied employment. In truth, I have heard accounts of Black veteran teachers (now retired) telling of stories of the rigorous procedures they had to endure to be hired by the Chicago School Board. In one account, a teacher said that she received her degree in education in 1950 from a southern university and applied for a job with the Chicago School Board. She said whereas White teachers were readily assigned to a school, Black teachers had to receive additional “training” before they were officially hired (personal communication, 2012). Furthermore, to avoid placing White teachers in Black schools, Chicago Public Schools Superintendent Willis created a new system to assign teachers to schools. Prior to 1955, teachers were appointed to schools by the school board. It wasn’t until after 1955 that teachers could select what schools in which they wanted to work (Neckerman, 2007).

## **The Rise of School Segregation and Racial Inequality**

In the previous section I outlined how the school board purposely preserved racial segregation of housing to elude racial integration of schools. In this section, I examine how intense school overcrowding was the catalyst of racial inequality in Chicago Public Schools. Sociologists contend that the Black community had experienced segregation in Chicago in the aspects of both housing and employment and negotiated with the options available to them. But as stratification intensified for their children, integration may have seemed like a viable option for the Black community.

However, some argued against integration, fearing that the Black culture would be lost (Shujaa, 1996). W. E. B. Dubois (1933/2002) was against integration. DuBois was the first African American to earn a doctorate from Harvard. He published several publications and books and was mostly widely known for his quest for social justice and his pioneering scholarship in research (Williams, 2005). DuBois pointed out, in his book *The Education of Black People*, that integration with Whites would lead to racial suicide. He further wrote, “We would lose our memory of Negro history and racial peculiarities which have long been associated with the Negro” (p. 194). DuBois fought for Negro culture patterns to co-exist in America without discrimination. He even foretold that integration would cause the crisis in inequality in education that exist today. He wrote in 1933, “Negro teachers will become rare, and in many cases disappear. Negro children ... will be taught under unpleasant if not discouraging circumstance. They will fall out of school, and cease to enter high school and fewer ... will go to college” (p. 195). Nonetheless, when the public school resources were obviously unequal for Black children in comparison to White children in the same school district, African American parents protested, demanding equal resources, but they had little power in city politics.



Mary Herricks (1971), a Chicago Public School teacher and researcher, provides a historical, detailed description of Chicago Public Schools as she kept data of school board meetings as early as 1930. Her work and that of Neckerman (2007), a researcher, give the reader the details of how Chicago Public School's choice of policies dealt with race. I use their combined work to analyze the history of the school curriculum and stratification that I experienced as a student in Chicago schools.

Because of the restricted housing policy, by 1939 84% of elementary school Black children attended a predominantly Black school, i.e., one in which 90% or more of the students were Black. Neckerman (2007) gives a detailed outline that connects the racially divided city of Chicago to the subsequent development of segregated and unequal schools. As was stated previously, although the school board denied that school policy was racially motivated, the school board aided in segregation. According to Neckerman, White communities that were well organized and had political influence wanted to maintain school segregation. School boards adjusted attendance boundaries and created patterns to keep Black and White children separate (Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007; Orfield, 1996). From 1910 to 1930, due to Blacks migrating from the South to Chicago for better economic opportunities, the Black population grew 67%. When racial change came to schools, the board sent the White students to neighboring White schools and kept only the Black students. The Black Belt was restricted from expansion, and there were limited options for the growing Black student population. These segregated practices of keeping White children separate from Black children were district wide, and subsequently, they led to overcrowding in Black schools. Racial inequality of Black and White children began here with overcrowding of Black schools. Because of the geographical and social confinements of covenant agreements, the Black Belt could not expand, and school officials refused to allow

Black children to transfer to neighboring White schools. The growing Black community pressured the school board, but little was done. Inevitably, overcrowding led to detrimental problems for Black students.

### **Overcrowding and Inequalities**

Segregated Black schools remained overcrowded and grossly underfunded (Danns, 2002; Herrick, 1971; Orfield, 1978, 1996). By 1940, it was estimated that three-fourths of all Black elementary students attended schools where double shifts were implemented, yet only one White school had this schedule (Neckerman, 2007). A research investigation by the Chicago Urban League in 1961 analyzed the expenditures of individual schools and found “established beyond question that segregated Negro schools were actually getting less in school funds per child than those in more prosperous White areas” (Herrick, 1971, p. 311). In addition, Herrick (1971) reported that in 1961 the typical Black school had averaged more than 42 students per classroom, compared to White schools, which averaged 32 students per classroom. The board addresses the problem of overcrowded schools by enacting more segregation school policy.

Overcrowding created significant problems for Black children and their teachers. The school board implemented double shifts in Black schools and some schools even had triple shifts in response to overcrowding. The board addressed the overcrowded condition in my school and others by parking mobile home classrooms on school grounds and implementing double shifts. These portable buildings, labeled “dog houses” and “Willis Wagons” after Chicago Public Schools Superintendent Willis, were cold in the winter and hot in the summer, and some reports indicated that the portable buildings were also prone to be rat infested. I recall when I attended Chicago schools as a child what was always apparent were the overcrowded conditions. During morning entrance and afternoon dismissal, I remember there being an ocean of children and that

one could not see the school building. The throng of so many children was overwhelming to me as a small child. The school was so overcrowded that our lunch periods were shortened to accommodate all of the students. This was brutal in the winter time because we children would have to bundle up and walk to the adjacent building to eat lunch and have gym. I recall us, as little children, often eating lunch with our winter coats on, as the schedule was so tight we had limited time to take off coats and eat. During one of these outdoor lunch time transitions, I recall being one of 40 small children witnessing our teacher, a petite little White lady, being knocked to the ground and having her purse snatched by two men.

This narrative illustrates how overcrowding affected more than three-fourths of all Black elementary school students who attended schools on double and even triple shifts (Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007). The readers must conceptualize how the double-shift schedule impacted the instruction time for these mostly migrant children. Southern Black migrants accounted for the overwhelming growth in the Black Belt in the 1940s, as the population grew 65% (Neckerman, 2007). These children were previously victims of Jim Crow school systems that were documented as racially motivated and unequal. So by all practical knowledge, these students had deficits in learning and thus needed more qualified instruction from a knowledgeable teaching staff (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

What this group of Black students needed the most at such a critical time in their academic development was a rigorous curriculum with additional instructional time for intervention, yet these Black children were denied this opportunity, which was literally just a walk away from their homes in neighboring White schools that had empty seats. Only one White school in the district was on double shift. The school board remained unwilling to transfer Black children to neighboring White schools that had stable enrollment. In those instances, when

Black students did transfer, they were confronted with protest and violence from the White community (Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007; Orfield, 1978, 1996). Subsequently, overcrowding and double (and triple) shift schedules cut instructional time by at least one hour or more every day for Black children. Inevitably, overcrowding of Black schools created a “racial deficit in instructional time, a vital resource for education” (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Neckerman, 2007).

This detriment of overcrowding was coupled with the fact that Black teachers faced hiring barriers, and other experienced teachers were less likely to work in overcrowded double-shift schools. Experienced teachers could not be retained in Black schools. Teachers avoided teaching in Black schools, thereby leaving Black schools understaffed with substitute teachers (Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007). Reports showed that in 1961, 3,500 of 18,000 teaching positions in the city went unfilled, more than 20% of the teachers were substitutes, and some schools had more than 50% substitute teachers.

In the Black community, the expenditures for teaching were less than those of White schools due to the fact that most Black schools were staffed by inexperienced, low-paid, novice and substitute teachers (Neckerman, 2007). Herrick (1971) further reported that in 1960 “the segregated Negro school... percentage of highly paid experienced teachers was low, and the proportion of low-paid substitutes was high, so that the total expenditures for teaching was demonstrably less (p. 311). What is more significant to this report is that a gap in salary was an indication of a gap in teaching experience. Another report stated that by 1940, the teaching staff at Black schools was 39% novice teachers in comparison to White immigrant schools, which had 22% (Strayer, 1937).

To further address overcrowding, the school board enacted a dubious transfer plan that was initiated in 1961. As it was, neighboring White school enrollment was stable. The transfer plan prohibited Black students from transferring to White schools unless strict guidelines were met. The plan stated that “No Negro child could ask for a transfer unless his school averaged more than 40 to a classroom, and no White school was listed for accepting transfer unless it had an average of less than 30 to a room” (Herrick, 1971, p. 312). Although other major cities employed busing to relieve overcrowded schools, the Chicago School Board thought it was expensive and did not implement busing (Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007; Orfield, 1978). New schools were built in Black neighborhoods and were also more segregated. More unconvincing federal mandates were issued to integrate, but the board did not make sincere efforts to integrate schools (Slaughter, 1967).

The restrictive covenants that had prevented Blacks from obtaining housing outside of the Black Belt were overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1947. Some Whites began to retreat to the suburbs, which allowed Blacks to obtain housing outside of the Black Belt in previously restrictive areas of the city, yet racial segregation was preserved in Chicago schools because as blacks began to expand school boundaries were changed by the district. According to Neckerman (2007), by means of Chicago civic elite and via urban renewal, another ghetto (after the Black Belt) was created. In contrast to the geographical isolation of the Black Belt, the new ghetto was high rise project housing and expressways through Black neighborhoods. These physical obstacles created justified school boundaries. The city Black and White schools remained unequal. In 1964, Chicago Public Schools reported that the proportions of Black elementary students in segregated schools was 89%, and high schools were 67%. It was further

reported that more Black children attended segregated schools in Illinois than in southern states (Neckerman, 2007).

Successively, racial segregation of Chicago became connected to district-wide inequality between Black and White schools. This was most evident in the deficit of instructional time and lack of qualified teachers for students who needed them the most. Orfield (1996) writes,

Inner city children experienced a far lower level of competition and far less stimulation than their equally talented and motivated suburban counterparts. The same relationships among race, common wealth, and achievement hold in other large urban communities, suggest that these relationships are systematic and structural. (p. 65)

Yet this inequality could have been avoided and severed at the root had the school board permitted Black students to attend neighboring White schools. The board's refusal to integrate was not only unethical but also an insouciance of federal law. Nonetheless, the hostility of White residents compounded with the lack of leadership on the part of the school board demonstrated their willingness to preserve segregation at the expense of Black children's education. And to add further insult to injury, the school board denied the existence of racial inequality (Neckerman, 2007).

### **The Social and Political History of Vocational Education**

To further grasp the roots of failure in Chicago Public Schools, one must understand the historical development of the vocational curriculum and how it is related to race. Before the turn of the century, Chicago Public Schools had a traditional curriculum that consisted of humanities, foreign language, arithmetic, reading, and writing. As early as 1890, Chicago Public Schools opened English High and Manual Training for Boys (Neckerman, 2007). Some of the elementary schools also began to offer some technical training skills to students. This school-based training,

also called “vocational,” was designed to meet the demands of the growing labor market. The vocational curriculum was successful inasmuch that it motivated students to stay in school who would have otherwise dropped out. Seventh and eighth graders were offered “pre-vocational classes” to prevent dropout after sixth grade. The curriculum consisted of clerical work, technical training, and commercial work; it was taught in addition to the academic curriculum and was optional for students.

Prior to the availability of vocational education in public schools, young men and women obtained a skilled trade or profession via an apprenticeship or employer training. Some Chicago schools even offered certification upon completion of course work, which was accepted for admission into colleges and universities. Vocational classes, according to sociologists, were attractive for two reasons: First, vocational education appealed to students from poor backgrounds because having school-based training with certification was essentially a guarantee to obtain employment and income. Second, vocational curriculum appealed to students who struggled academically. Prior to vocational education, struggling students simply dropped out of school, so the number of high school graduates was limited. Consequently, the number of high school graduates increased due to students completing the vocational program (Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007). This ironically created a problem for the labor market. The more students graduated from high school, the more the market was “flooded” with skilled labor. Sociologist George Strayer, in a 1937 report, cautioned Chicago Public Schools not to train too many boys in the same skills as it would “flood” the market (Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007).

The original role of the public school curriculum in Chicago began to change as early as 1908, when businesses and labor unions began to appear before the board eager to implement school-based industrial training. The Chicago Federation of Labor, the Commercial Club, and

The National Association of Manufacturers appeared before the board to expand the “industrial education” and took legal action to impose compulsory industrial education for all Chicago Public School students beginning in sixth grade until the age of sixteen, less they were in another school (Herrick, 1971). According to Herrick, the Cooley Bill, named after former Chicago Public Schools Superintendent Cooley, was a plan to incorporate a dual system, derived from Europe, a two-tiered system of non-interchangeable high schools, academic and vocational. The system required one type of school for students going into professions and another for students trained to work manually (Herrick, 1971).

Ella Flagg Young, the first woman superintendent of Chicago public schools, teachers, and labor unions opposed the plan. Herrick (1971) writes,

When opposition arose, the business organizations insisted that they knew the needs of industry and that these needs must determine the nature of vocational education and the methods by which such education should be implemented. They urged the passage of the Cooley Bill. (p. 118)

Other civic organizations did further study on the plan, as it was already implemented elsewhere in the state of Wisconsin, and strongly opposed a system of separate schools. Teachers and other organizations so opposed the plan that they sent representatives to Springfield to oppose the stratification system. Teachers asserted that the two-track system, “trained youth to accept lower-class status and blocked the social mobility which is the mark of American society” (Herrick, 1971, p. 119), and John Dewey was even on record opposing the plan. There was intensive opposition between the businesses and the labor unions, although it appeared that the unions initially supported the plan. Yet the opposition may have arisen due to the nature of the bill being compulsory, thereby excluding most children in Chicago Public Schools and selecting



a few. Herrick notes that the unions accused the businesses of getting “cheap and submissive labor without the educational background American citizens should have,” and that “Educators said that the plan wanted to train children for their convenience... and assign the poor to dead-end schools with no chance of upward mobility” (p. 119).

The Cooley Bill went to legislation in 1913, 1915, and 1917 and failed. Yet the school board successively implemented the plan of the stratification system. Indirectly, the governing school board had a private sponsor called the Association of Commerce that provided guidance for vocational training for children in school. Members of the Chicago School Board were active members of this association. This guidance for vocational training was then taken over by the school board in 1916. Consequently, students who were in the upper-tier were those who had been accepted into elite school courses based on academic achievement and were selected to take courses that led to professions. The students who had low achievement were channeled to lower-tiered courses. These schools provided mostly vocational training for low-skilled manual labor, so students had fewer if any opportunities to obtain professional jobs. The number of low-tiered graduates had grown, encompassing the majority of high school graduates (Neckerman, 2007). Subsequently, the board dropped the high-tiered courses from the general school population. By 1937, revision in the high school curriculum began with stratification of the academic and vocational curriculum and the two-tiered system was fully developed.

Thus, by the twentieth century, Chicago Public Schools, “shifted the curriculum choice from the student to the school” (Neckerman, 2007, p. 120), specifically to exclude and select children and educate students “explicitly” for the labor market (Price, Duffy, & Giordani, 2015). This selection and exclusion was done via school records, standardized testing, grades, and teacher comments (Herrick, 1971).

## **Lessons to Learn: The Civic Elite as the Driving Force behind School Policy**

I believed that the aforementioned event is crucial to the history of inferior schools. Although it was true that the stratification of the curriculum was not directly implemented by the school board, it is important to note that in 1911 the civic elite of Chicago commissioned former Chicago Public Schools Superintendent Edwin J. Cooley to go to Europe and study the vocational education system there (Herrick, 1971). The superintendent at the time, Ella Flag Young, labor unions, and teachers vehemently opposed the plan as is evident in its successively failed attempts to become legislation. Superintendent Young contended that the Cooley Bill forbade the social mobility of students, yet the board expanded low-tiered vocational education to the general school population (Neckerman, 2007; Price, Duffy, & Giordani, 2015).

The Cooley Bill, although met with strong opposition, in the end was implemented and expanded to the general school population and continues to attribute to school failure inasmuch that, as the system became even more stratified, higher-tier schools forbade Blacks to enroll (Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007; Slaughter, 1967). The history of Washburne Trade School, a high-tiered, selective apprentice school, is highlighted elsewhere in this essay and is an example of the overt racism and barriers to young Black men for decades. This is an important lesson to be learned by the reader, and that lesson is this: I contend that powerful people are the driving force behind failed school policy. The school board alone was not the only responsible party for segregation leading to school inequality. As was cited elsewhere in this essay, all levels of government were implicated in neighborhood racial segregation (Orfield, 1978, 1996). There were intentional barriers that were structured in public educational institutions to prevent social mobility (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Rousseau, 2006). Even when strong opposition was evident, like it was against the Cooley Bill in Chicago, the most powerful people in the city were

the driving force behind district policy to implement curriculum stratification that is still preserved today, as this essay will show in the next section. This was the case in Chicago a century ago. Those with the most political power changed the function of the third largest public school district in the country.

When stratification was implemented in Chicago Schools, the results were devastating for African Americans. For one, the location of the high-tiered schools like Lane Technical High School and Crane were geographically far from the Black Belt. The Chicago Vocational School, although located on the South Side of Chicago, didn't initially allow Blacks to attend (Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007; Vose, 1959). The same was true about Washburne Trade School (Slaughter, 1967; "Union controls Chicago school board," 1940; Vose, 1959). Tilden was in close proximity to the Black Belt, but it had a reputation for being violent towards African Americans. In 1929, other students at Tilden forced the small population of 60 Black young men out of the school (Neckerman, 2007). Furthermore, Black students faced racial discrimination in the labor market. The high-tiered schools, like Washburne, were managed by the labor unions, and they barred Blacks from Washburne for many years.

### **Community Response to Racial Inequality**

The community response to racial inequality is evident in the newspaper reports of the time. The *Chicago Defender*, a local newspaper, gives accounts of a Chicago Public School budget hearing in January 1940. According to the article, Alderman Earl Dickerson declared that gross discrimination existed at the Washburne Trade School. He said that students of "race" were not allowed to use equipment at the school because of union control. He also said that if the conditions continued, then the board should stop appropriating funds to Washburne. The article further mentioned how South Side schools were overcrowded, yet were receiving less

funds from the board. A Chicago Defender September 1941 article named the controlling labor unions: Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) and the American Federation of Labor (AFL). In the article, the CIO allowed Blacks in membership, but the AFL did not. There was a local clash between the two concerning contractor work in Chicago. Most interesting was that the AFL was one of the controlling unions at Washburne Trade School. The CIO accused the AFL of blocking "negroes" from taking certain trade courses at Washburne.

In 1958, a federal judge issued a consent decree to end racial discrimination in the trade courses at Washburne. Although it was a Chicago Public School, Washburne was sponsored and controlled by more than 20 worker unions. In a February 1963 *Chicago Tribune* article, the Chicago Public Schools Superintendent Benjamin C. Willis was asked why were there only three Negroes enrolled in Washburne Trade School. He responded by saying that employers and unions dictate who is enrolled at Washburne, not the school board. Students and parents began to partner with civil rights activists in their community and also sued the school board.

I believe the Black community grew more intensely resentful of the Chicago Public Schools over time. Many had migrated from the South to Chicago in hopes of finding better schools and employment for their children, but they were met with racism that was overt and well organized. Their children were not prepared for gainful employment and were oppressed by the system of segregation. So noticeable was this racism that schools failed to employ African American teachers thereby assisting their Black children from escaping an inferior position in society that had been their position for hundreds of years (Herrick, 1971). Civil right laws had not assisted their fate, but somehow made it worse in the city. This was evident in the Chicago Freedom Campaign, which was launched by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to end slums in Chicago.

## **Beyond Desegregation: Shujaa, Dempsey, and Noblit**

In 1963 and 1964, Chicago Public School students, parents, and the Black community had mass demonstrations and boycotted the school board. Students from Austin High School said “teachers were racist.” Carver, Austin, Harrison, and more Black Chicago public high schools participated in massive protests in 1963 and 1964 (Danns, 2002). The students made demands to the Chicago School Board to fire their White principals and employ Black administrators in their schools, the premise being that Black administrators would celebrate the contributions that African Americans had made to American society. Furthermore, the premise was that Black administrators would implement a rigorous curriculum that was for the greater good of the African American community. Additionally, students made demands to have Black history courses offered as part of the school curriculum. Students of the Civil Rights era were aware that they were taught that they were an inferior race and recognized the systematic pattern of racism in the school structure. In contrast to integrating their schools, demands were made to celebrate Black culture and recognize the value that African Americans contributed to America.

The students’ demands speak to the cultural consequences of desegregation. Not all African Americans favored desegregation, and as the students’ demands illustrated, they were not demanding integration but celebration of their Black culture. In the South, for instance, when desegregation came, many Black teachers at Black schools were displaced, and Black children were integrated to White schools. Dempsey argues that desegregation alone could not solve the ills of failing schools and might in fact harm African American children inasmuch that school desegregation could destroy important elements of African American culture (Shujaa, 1996). According to Shujaa (1996), African Americans failed to celebrate the stories of success during the time of desegregation. Schools that were created by African American communities

were closely knitted together. Another factor to consider is that prior to desegregation, African Americans teachers taught about the accomplishments of notable African Americans. Most of all, teachers took interest in students and their families. This argument suggests that there could have been positive elements to schools remaining segregated.

As the reader will discover, it is not the argument of this essay that discrimination ended with school integration, but that failing schools are the result of racial inequality in segregated schools and the cause of damage for all students.

### **Race is the Issue**

African Americans have historically had a subordinate position in American society. For example, African Americans were slaves in America for 250 years and existed as inferior citizens for an additional 100 years. Moreover, the country, as Gloria Ladson-Billings (2004) points out, is only about 239 years old, so it existed as a slave nation longer than it has as a free one, and therefore, the attempt of policy makers to deal with racial problems through schools is shortsighted. The historical account of Chicago Public Schools was provided in this essay to illustrate the intentions of the stratification system and the mechanism of segregation to preserve inequality to Black students and other students of color. This history is crucial as I examine the current status of Chicago schools from a Critical Race perspective (Rousseau, 2006). Race continued to be an issue in education.

### **Chicago Schools Current Race Issue (Disparities)**

Race continues to be an issue in Chicago schools insofar by the disparities between Black and White students in the best schools. The Chicago Public School district serves 396,683 students. In 2015, it was 39.3% African American, 45.6% Hispanic, 9.4% White, and 3.6% Asian. Students who are considered economically disadvantaged were 86.02%. Chicago had

been dubbed as having some of the worst performing schools in the country by Education Secretary William J. Bennett (“Schools in Chicago Are Called the Worst By Education Chief,” 1987). Robeson High School, Austin Community High School, Carver Military Academy, and Chicago Vocational Career Academy High School (formerly CVS) were some of the lowest performing schools (U.S. News & World Report, 2015). All of the above schools, except for Carver, had a racial population that was at least 95% Black. Carver was the exception, with 44% Black and 54% Hispanic students.

Conversely, the top five high schools in the state of Illinois in 2015, according to *U.S. News & World Report*, are also Chicago Public Schools: Northside College Preparatory High School, Walter Payton College Preparatory High School, Jones College Preparatory High School, Whitney M. Young Magnet High School, and Lane Technical High School. These schools are selective enrollment schools that accept students from across the city, but often they are located in affluent White neighborhoods and a majority of the student population is White. My point is this: How can a majority Black and Hispanic-populated, large urban, school district, with less than a ten percent White population, have a White majority population in the best schools in the city? This gross disparity represents that race is still an issue.

At a recent local school board meeting, one parent said, “You can’t separate the failure in these schools from what’s been done to them by Chicago Public Schools” (Lipman, 2011, p. 53). The student performance and demographics data coupled with the historical events highlighted in this essay show how the school board preserved an unequal school system by intentionally segregating students. In this section, I use the framework of Critical Race Theory to analyze the past and present state of Chicago Public Schools (Rousseau, 2006).

## **Critical Race Theory**

To further explore the subordinate position of African Americans, I employ Critical Race Theory (CRT). It focuses on (a) the effects of racism, (b) its victims, and (c) the offenders while exploring ways to bring social justice to marginalized people (A. Dixon, 2011; J. T. Dixon, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Two of the basic premises of CRT are that “racism is a permanent component of American life” and “the permanence of racism indicates that racist hierarchical structures govern all political, economic, and social domains, including education” (T. J. Dixon, 2004, p. 27). Once one accepts the basic premises of CRT, as J. T. Dixon (2004) cites, one develops a realistic view of the dominant role racism has in American society.

**Racial idealist versus racial realist.** There are two approaches to CRT. The first is described as “idealist” racism. That is, the idea that “racism and discrimination are matters of thinking, attitudes, categorization, and discourse” (Dixon & Rousseau, 2006, p. 114). In the idealist approach, some CRT scholars believe that once stereotypes and name calling are removed from society, then the American social consciousness will change about African Americans and other minorities.

The other mode of thought, according to Delgado (2001), is called “racial realist.” This approach argues that while attitudes and thinking are acts of racism, “realist view racism as a means by which society [systematically] allocates privilege, status, and wealth” (Dixon & Rousseau, 2006, p. 114). Dixon and Rousseau (2006) further explain that the “racial realist” focuses on the material factors of how racism creates African Americans as a subgroup. The focus of this study is on the relationship of racial inequality in education and subsequent subordinate positions of Blacks in society. Therefore, I will use the approach of the “racial realist” in this essay to examine the current Chicago school system and efforts to reform it.



**Symbolic subordination and material subordination.** According to Critical Race theorist Crenshaw (as cited in Dixson & Rousseau, 2006),

Symbolic subordination refers to the denial of social and political equality to all Blacks, regardless of their accomplishments” .... Jim Crow segregation was one manifestation of symbolic subordination. “Material subordination” on the other hand, refers to the ways that discrimination and exclusion economically subordinates Blacks to Whites on almost all levels. (p. 1377)

The continual segregation of schools put African American children and educators in a subordinate position to Whites (Orfield, 1966).

Given the nature of the historical documentation of racial inequality in Chicago schools, this study has illustrated that housing segregation in Chicago did not occur by chance. It was created, manipulated, and maintained by Chicago Public Schools (Herrick, 1971; Orfield, 1978, 1996; Slaughter, 1967). Careful planning, preparation, and implementation of school policies were intentionally put into operation by Chicago Public Schools to maintain racial segregation leading to unequal education of African American students (Herrick, 1971; Orfield, 1978, 1996). “Material subordination” is a key component of structural racism. It is this “mechanism” of housing segregation that continues to distract attention away from racial subordination, while at the same time justify continuing inequity by failing to acknowledge the mechanism, such as racial inequality, which maintains ongoing material subordination (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Massey & Denton, 1993). In truth, this is how Chicago and other Northern schools justified segregated schools, thus dodging federal mandates to integrate. Housing segregation was the smokescreen away from racial subordination. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) state,

Some argue that poor children, regardless of race, do worse in school, and that the high proportion of African American poor contributed to their dismal school performance [I] believe that the cause of their poverty combined with the condition of their schools and schooling is institutional and structural racism. (p. 575)

Crenshaw clarifies that while race appears to be neutral, the system creates the illusion that racism is no longer the primary factor responsible for the Black underclass; instead the disparities in the Black class are consequences of individual and group merit in a supposedly equal system (as cited in Dixon & Rousseau, 2006). The Chicago School Board continued a system of segregation to maintain an unequal education system (Herrick, 1971). When combined, the educational and housing systems deprived African Americans of both better jobs and affordable housing. As was mentioned elsewhere in this essay, the demand for trained workers increased in the market, but Blacks were left unprepared by the school system and faced increased discrimination by labor unions (Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007).

**Whiteness as property.** Critical Race Theory is rooted in Critical Legal Studies, which were pioneered by attorney Cheryl Harris. Harris's (1993) work elaborates on why political and legal claims for justice had been inadequately addressed. Harris contends that the law failed to recognize the system of racial domination. Specifically, the concept of Whiteness as property is the notion that the rights to possession, use and enjoyment, transfer, and exclusion have been most exclusively for White people (J. D. Dixon, 2004). I would have the reader reflect briefly upon the history of Native Americans and chattel slavery in this nation, in that property rights were associated with racial domination. Removal of Native Americans was ratified by law by acknowledging the property rights of Whites in Native American land. As Harris argues, only White possession of land was validated and, therefore, privileged as a basis for property rights.

“Only Black were subjugated as slaves and treated as objects of property” (Harris, 1993, p. 1716). Thus, race and property became interrelated and established. These two examples of exploitation illustrate the construction of whiteness as property. To be White meant to be protected from being enslaved (Harris, 1993).

When one considers the present status of the Chicago Public School district and the exacerbating racial disparities of how the larger Black and Hispanic student population (85% district wide) are channeled to inferior schools in comparison to an extremely low White student population (only 9.3% district wide) are channeled to the best schools, one must use the perspective that access to higher-tiered “intelligent property” has been exclusive to White students (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; J. T. Dixson, 2004). Orfield (1996) writes,

Inner city children experienced a far lower level of competition and far less stimulation than their equally talented and motivated suburban counterparts. The same relationships among race, common wealth, and achievement hold in other large urban communities, suggest that these relationships are systematic and structural. (p. 65)

Furthermore, as J. T. Dixson (2004) points out, “The formal way that selection and admission into these programs are conducted guarantee that students of color have virtually no access to a high quality curriculum or certainly one that will prepare them for college attendance” (p. 28).

### **Chicago and Corporate School Reform**

This idea of whiteness as property leads me to the current school reform efforts that are impacting not only Chicago but also the nation. As the historical context of this essay highlighted, I argued that in 1911 the politically powerful civic elite in Chicago changed the function of Chicago schools and created a stratification system that excluded Black students and others from upper-tier schools. Furthermore, as Orfield (1996) pointed out, the same

relationships among race, common wealth, and achievement hold in other large urban communities and suggest that these relationships are systematic and structural.

Today reform efforts are directed by corporations and philanthropists and are aimed at inequality in public schools. They demand that all children perform and achieve equally, with no excuses (Neckerman, 2007; Orfield, 2013). Even the first Black U.S. President, Barack Obama, wrote the *Blueprint for Reform the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2010* (ESEA) as an appeal for the country to take an active role to equally educate all children. President Obama believes that every child in the United States of America should be a high school graduate and ready for a career upon graduation. The ESEA points out that the states want to ensure equity with resources between high and low-poverty schools. This idea is noteworthy and shows that the President shows concern for education of American children. President Obama even implemented Race to the Top, an initiative that rewards charter schools and states for achievement gains. The argument behind Race to the Top is that if we offer better options (choice) to poor and minority students than what they currently have (failing schools), they will perform better.

### **Market Ideologies**

It is my argument that the ESEA proposal will not implement equity in education but will create more inequity in education for Black and other students of color. This proposal was written to change current operations in failing schools based on the ideology that schools are low performing due to, among other things, improper management in the public sector and teachers unions. Some policy makers and theorists believe that the market by nature will produce better results than large governmental bureaucracies like Chicago Public Schools. They make mention of the expenditure of money and waste generated by these government institutions. In the market

theory of choice, nonpublic options and institutions are better than public institutions because individuals will come up with better options regardless of which choice is offered. The market, according to these ideologies, will create better schools that are not inefficient due to bureaucracy and will allow parents to move their children from inferior schools to better, more successful schools. In addition, the market theory of choice contends that when students are given the chance to exit inferior schools, those schools will not get worse for the students left behind because competition will motivate the failing school (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013). In truth, one strong positive regarding charter movements is that they recruit students beyond neighborhood boundaries. Watkins (2012) said, “Vested economic power has directly asserted itself into education policy making” (p. 25).

I am not arguing that Black and other children of color don’t deserve something better than their current failing schools. On the contrary, the disparities among Black and White, rich and poor are highlighted in this essay. As Orfield’s (1978, 1996) research indicates, the interest of corporate elites and other powerful people, accountability policies, standardized testing, and other reform efforts have not worked in Chicago or elsewhere.

### **Chicago and Renaissance 2010**

In 2004, Mayor Daley launched Renaissance 2010 in Chicago. Renaissance 2010 was a plan to close and then reopen 100 new schools as charter or contract schools. Although 2010 has passed, the plan continues to move forward in Chicago. According to the Chicago Public Schools Renaissance 2010 website, more than 100 schools were closed, turned over, phased out, or consolidated in Chicago. Beginning in the year 2000, the agenda was to target failing schools, then “transform” them. “Renaissance 2010 is an experiment to reinvent the third largest U.S. public school system as an education market” (Watkins, 2012, p. 33). In the case of Renaissance

2010 in Chicago, interrelationship of urban restructuring, the politics of race, and U.S. urban school reform was an agenda of the most powerful financial and corporate elites and city officials (Watkins, 2012). At the national level, many foundations and sponsored groups, such as Heritage, Gates, Broad, and Annenberg, involve themselves in education innovation (Watkins, 2012).

When schools were closed in Chicago, for example, decisions were made by appointed officials and corporate partners behind closed doors (Watkins, 2012). Although a public hearing is held, the decision to close a school has already been made. The community in which the school resides is given one-month notice, without any local representatives participating in the decision to close the school. I would think that the parents and students would at least be given the opportunity to participate in the decision to close their neighborhood school. Revealing that the decision to close a public institution excludes the very people it intends to serve when the school is reopened raises a pertinent question: Who will be served when the school reopens? The Chicago Teachers Union reported in June 2012 that less than 51% of the students in attendance at charter schools are from the community in which they are located. This is not equity.

### **The Missing Perspective: Force Choice**

In Chicago, corporate charter schools are mainly in very low-income African American and Latino communities. In some areas, the only school choices for parents are the charter schools, as neighborhood public schools are closed. Charter schools are comprised of a public and private partnership that allows the implementation of public education via private corporate providers (Lipman, 2011). There are various kinds of charter schools in Chicago. Most are corporate, but some are operated by communities of parents and educators. As written elsewhere,

Renaissance 2010 was a plan created by Chicago Mayor Richard Daley to close 60-70 schools and reopen 100 new schools that are managed by private organizations. At a recent local school board meeting, one parent said, “You can’t separate the failure in these schools from what’s been done to them by Chicago Public Schools” (Lipman, 2011, p. 53). In poor African American and Latino communities, parents give accounts of generations of disinvestment and neglect in the neighborhood schools.

By further analysis, a greater issue is raised. Although the ESEA is presented to further the education of poor African Americans and Latinos, it also seems to exclude them. Dionne Danna (2002) wrote an article that highlighted the school reform efforts of 1968. In it, she writes about the Chicago Public School student boycott of 1963-1964, in which the students, teachers, and parents were conscious of their unequal education; nonetheless, they wanted an education that was controlled in their best interest and would benefit their community. In my opinion, the ESEA does not include the perspective or the voice of the community it aims to improve. As Danna emphasized, “Education served as an essential component of empowerment” (p. 633). The current education reform policy does not empower the community it intends to serve, but on the contrary, it grossly empowers private corporations.

### **Choice without Civil Rights**

How can choice alone erase the more than a century of racial oppression and inequality in education? What is not taken seriously by these reform efforts, as Neckerman (2007) suggests, is that the true political intentions of the urban school institution from the onset are not made visible until history reveals them. As this study reveals, educational institutions were not created for individuals but for groups (Orfield, 1978). Therefore, as Orfield (2013) contends, “ignoring the essential civil rights dimensions of choice plans risks compounding rather than remedy racial

inequality” (p. 3). I am forced to consider the history of urban schools to validate my argument. The laws to integrate and equalize education had been ignored for decades after federal mandates were issued, and one must consider that the same racist administrators who implemented policies to maintain and preserve segregated schools leading to failure are the same administrators who implemented integrated schools. The hostile White residents in Chicago who barred Black families from integrating their children in schools were the same people who moved to the suburbs in their flight from the integration mandates. Similarly, as the historical context of this essay illustrates, industry leaders and civic elites who fought to stratify the Chicago public schools are similar to the corporate elite today insomuch that they want to create an inferior labor force to serve White privilege. My point is that reformist efforts to implement choice as a remedy for failing schools is delusional.

### **Schooling Insures Status Quo: Shujaa**

What education reformists fail to recognize is that “schooling” (unlike education), according to Shujaa (2003), for African Americans and other people of color “is intended to ensure the status quo power relationships are maintained” (p. 179). Somehow I feel, as Shujaa writes, that those in power are distorting the truth about education to suit their corporate interest insomuch that students’ achievement and success are accessed and controlled by society. Simply put, schools fail because they are designed to fail and to maintain the subordinate role of African Americans in society. This is most evident in stratification and limited access to the best schools. Americans think that everyone has a choice in education. This is not true. Choice as it is presented via reform efforts is not necessarily a better choice. Research has indicated that schools of choice (charter schools) have shown little improvement in achievement in comparison to their counterpart, failing public schools (Orfield, 1978).



As Shujaa (2003) wrote, “Schooling in contrast to education is a process intended to perpetuate and maintain society’s existing power relations and the institutional structures that support those arrangements” (p. 181). As was illustrated previously in this essay, the civic elite in society impose their views of what education should be by choosing the curriculum for public schools that exist today. Schools are places where children are stratified and categorized and selected for their roles in society (Orfield, 2013; Shujaa, 2003).

It is important to point out, as I wrote earlier in this section, that not all charter schools are managed by corporations. Some are managed by organizations such as The Black Alliance for Education Options (BAEO). This organization was a grassroots organization that started in Wisconsin. The mission of this organization, as posted on its website, is this: “We are unapologetic in our belief that the changes we seek require engagement and/or leadership by the Black community on behalf of the Black community” (Black Alliance for Education Options, 2016). My point is that if the education choice movement has chosen to exclude the community in the decision about their children, how is this any different than silencing the voice of the oppressed?

### **Conflict Approaches to Education: Neo-Marxist**

The view of the education system in our nation can also be viewed through the lens of the neo-Marxist approach. It contends that education serves the interest of the capitalist ruling class and, therefore, is the reproduction of privilege (Bowels & Gintis, 1976). Furthermore, this approach contends that the ideology of the ruling class enables and secures inequality in education. Thus, the function of education for the working class is merely a means to reproduce social and educational inequalities (Lauder, 2006). Moreover, the problem with capitalism in a democratic state is that it is assumed that opportunity could be extended to all by means of

education. However, as this essay has illustrated, access to equal education is restricted, thereby limiting opportunity and reward to the working class. What is crucial to this theory is that neo-Marxists emphasize that the capabilities of the vast majority are being suppressed and sacrificed in the interest of the ruling class.

## **Conclusion**

I understand the distrust my mother had in the school board. She recognized that the segregation policy inherently made my education unequal. I was ignorant of the vicious cycle of racism in the City of Chicago, but I am pained because the research reveals a pattern of structural racism that allocated an unequal education to generations of African American children. In my communications with my mother, she said, “Your father was bitter because of his unfair treatment at Washburne Trade School” (personal communication, 2013). Pertinent questions flood my mind in regard to years of racist Chicago Public Schools policies and their effect on students of African American and Hispanic descent. Was it that the true intent of school policies was to implement an inferior school curriculum for Black children, thereby putting them in a subordinate position to Whites? My life experiences suggest that this was the case, but before this research, I was not aware of the careful planning, preparation, and implementation of board policies that were intentionally put into operation to maintain racial segregation that led to the unequal education of African American students. The school board policy contributed to the dismal academic performance of generations of African American children and other children of color, and it is maintained today.

I don’t believe that Chicago Public Schools are better today compared to what they were like 50 years ago. I believe that segregated racism is the same. Research has shown that charter schools are highly segregated (Frankenberg, 2010). I believe that these schools may have

become worst. In this age of tremendous pressure on schools through excessive standardized testing and teacher accountability, no research has shown that these efforts have improved failing schools. In fact, No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and other state reforms have shown that the segregated and poor neighborhood schools and most charter schools have the same academic achievement outcomes (Frankenberg, 2010; Orfield, 2013; Watkins, 2012). Despite this research, the nation's philanthropists and reformists continue to want to adopt the charter movement.

I am grateful for the reformists who truly recognize the perils in our public school system and who have made sincere efforts to see all children succeed in this country. These reformists have contributed to the scholarship of my education. However, what is not resonating with advocates for charter schools is that this nation cannot have a solution to failing schools without referencing segregation and systems of barriers. Instead of referencing these facts, advocates for charters have “shifted the blame of school failure to school bureaucracies and teachers” (Orfield, 1978, p. 18). They are ignorant of the historical significance of segregation and urban schools that I referenced in this essay (Lipman, 2011; Watkins, 2012). I would say to advocates of market choice theory: If you want to see students achieve, share your highly esteemed neighborhood schools with those who are locked into inferior schools. Will we be welcomed?

The 1964 Civil Rights Act was enacted to bring the power of the executive branch to enforce desegregation, because plans to provide equality of education had become the burden of non-White families. Specific guidelines and civil rights protections were set forth into law to ensure that plans for integration were adhered to. Without these protections, Black children had barriers to integrating into the best schools. Magnet schools were developed, and they often had better educational advantages for all races.

Today the very legislation that was passed in 1964 to ensure civil rights in education has since been reversed by the U.S. Supreme Court. In 2007, “the chief justice concluded that school segregation was no longer a problem and that doing anything aimed at integrating schools, even using a choice mechanism, violated the Constitution” (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013, p. 26) This policy has been instrumental in increasing segregation and has prohibited laws that produce integration. Yes, schools for Black children are worse than they have been.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Methodology**

This chapter addresses the methodological and theoretical research design of the study. Because my research focused on the themes of education, race, and inequality in a large city school district, the foundation of my work is framed in a qualitative research study and the nexus of a Critical Race Theory (CRT) epistemology. According to Creswell (2013), the process of qualitative research is inductive, emerging, and shaped by the experiences of the researcher. Consequently, this is how knowledge is known via the subjective experiences of people. This study details the personal lived experiences of myself and my culture-sharing group of other African-Americans. Elsewhere in this study, I presented the literature regarding public school policy in Chicago. In this chapter, in addition to the theoretical approach to this study, I share a narrative description as the foundation of my research through the lens of a counter-story by detailing the specific socio-historical context of my education. According to Parker and Lynn (2002), concerns regarding race have not been fully illustrated in previous educational research. In this chapter, as the reader will discover, narratives about discrimination can be an epistemological tool in Critical Race Theory to expose purposeful racism in education.

This chapter will present the counter-stories of school policies viewed through the lens of an African-American student (myself), as I was a victim of said policies. Critical race theory provides a framework to comprehend the events and powers that shape issues of race (A. D. Dixon, 2006). I was motivated to write this study because education and equity has always intrigued me! I am a living testimony as I survived racism, poverty, and inferior education. I beat the odds that were structured against me, and now I live. I am Black, and I was born in poverty; as such, I attended the worst public schools. And by Divine grace, I was permitted to

attend the best public schools in Chicago. (This was indeed a unique and rare experience.) As it is documented in this essay, mostly non-White students become locked into inferior schools facing significant barriers to gain access to better schools. When I was a sophomore in high school, my father was offered an apartment in an affluent suburban neighborhood in exchange for his services as a carpenter. Beyond this barter and trade agreement, my family could not have afforded to live outside of our subsidized housing complex in Chicago.

I experienced education first in Chicago. The first school that I attended as a small child was the local public elementary school in my African American, segregated neighborhood in Chicago. It was a failing public school plagued with disinvestment. During this time, the early '70s, there was a strong Black community of resistance response to inferior education. In accordance with racial uplift and as an act of resistance, in addition to attending public school every day, my mother also involved me in a homeschool experience. Also, during a brief time of financial independence, my parents enrolled my siblings and me in a parochial school. My high school education curriculum (the most conflicting to all my other experiences), was situated in a suburban, more affluent community. Consequently, these improbable experiences led me on a journey of social inquiry and research to find meaning as to why these experiences in my education were grossly unequal. Simply put, I wanted to know why my education in my public school in Chicago was inferior to that of my public school in the suburbs. Thus, I gathered data through my participation and observation in Chicago Public Schools and suburban schools.

The purpose of this essay is to provide a historical background of Chicago's restrictive housing policy and the subsequent development and maintenance of segregated schools. Then, by exploring the tenets of CRT, I analyze how education policy is related to race by examining research regarding the inferior education of African Americans and people of color in the United

States. I use my personal lived experiences, via an autoethnography, to expound on how my education intersected with the policies and economics of the time.

The primary research questions that will be addressed in this study will be:

- What were the education policies 40 years ago that created inferior schools?
- How was my race related to the school that I attended?
- How are current education reform policies related to race?
- How are these policies creating segregation and inferior schools for African Americans and people of color today?

### **Qualitative Research**

Creswell (2013) indicated that when researchers conduct a qualitative research study, they embrace multiple realities with the intention of reporting these multiple realities. This is evident when the researcher presents the different perspectives of individuals. In addition, knowledge gained in a qualitative study is learned via the subjective experiences of people's lives. In other words, the research attempts to live the life of the individual (or group) being researched by becoming an insider. This is achieved by spending a considerable amount of time with participants. Creswell further suggested that qualitative researchers make their values known. Thus, qualitative researchers admit their values and biases in that it is apparent that they are positioned in the research and have a voice. Finally, qualitative researchers work with the details of events before making generalizations. By using inductive logic that is emerging, the researcher studies the topic in its context (Creswell, 2013).

In this qualitative study, I take an interpretive approach that focuses on my personal lived experiences, specifically my educational experience. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) point out that the qualitative researcher is after the "social meaning that people attribute to their

experience” (p. 4). I believe I felt victim to an inferior education because I was born Black. The historical literature that I provided in this study supports my beliefs. Thus, because my experience is under the discipline of social justice, I employed the interpretive framework of CRT, as it valued my experiential knowledge about the Chicago Public School system.

### **Theoretical Interpretive Framework: Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory has roots in African-American, Latino, and Native American social thoughts. Thus, CRT was borne out of the need of people of color, as Parker and Lynn (2002) pointed out, to move racism from discussions to an ideology (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Racism has been traditionally viewed as a “willful act of aggression against a person based on their skin color or other phenotypic characteristics” (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 8), but rarely has it been revealed how entrenched racism is within the American society (Omni & Winant, 1994, as quoted in Parker & Lynn, 2002). Consequently, discussing racism as an analytical tool used to oppress people has not been easy in the academic arena.

**Race theorized.** Can we deny the problematic aspects of race? Critical Race Theory scholars Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) point out that thinking of race strictly as an ideology denies the reality of how race impacts the lives of people every day. It’s not clear if we can categorize racial mixtures, because people group themselves in diverse ways that are constantly changing. Biologically, the notion of race serves no purpose (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Nonetheless, as Ladson-Billing and Tate suggest, race is so rooted in the daily discourse of American life that it is more on display than it has ever been.

**Black subordination.** African Americans have historically had a subordinate position in American society. For example, African Americans were slaves in America for 250 years, then existed as inferior citizens for an additional 100 years. Moreover, the nation, as Gloria Ladson-



Billings (2004) points out, is only about 239 years old, and therefore, it existed as a slave nation longer than it has as a free one. Therefore, the attempts of policy makers to deal with racial problems through schools is shortsighted (Ladson-Billings, 2004). Critical Race Theory scholars categorized Black subordination in society by two different approaches: symbolic and material (Crenshaw, 1988). Symbolic subordination is the denial of social and political equality to all who are Black, regardless of their accomplishments. According to A. D. Dixon (2006), an example of symbolic subordination is Jim Crow segregation laws. These were the segregated laws that Civil Right leaders tried to decimate. “Material subordination is the way that discrimination and exclusion economically subordinates Blacks to Whites and subordinated the life chances of Blacks to those of Whites on almost every level” (Crenshaw, 1988, p. 1377).

**Historical context.** In this section of the study, I employed the work of Parker and Lynn (2002). Their work defined the theoretical framework of CRT within a socio-historical context, theorized the notion of race, and provided a connection to qualitative research. Parker and Lynn define CRT as a “legal theory of race and racism designed to uncover how race and racism operate in the law and in society” (p. 7). The argument presented by CRT scholars is that the paradigms of race have been combined with ethnicity, class, and nation because race has not had priority in social sciences (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Winant, 1993). As such, CRT scholars attempted to uncover and untangle the socio-structural and cultural significance of race in education. Both Ladson Billings and Tate (1995) and Harris’s (1993) intellectual works moved beyond the confines of educational literature to legal arguments and the social sciences to theorize race and to use it as an analytical tool for understanding educational inequality.

The founding fathers of CRT, Derrick Bell (1988) and Richard Delgado (1989), were attorneys who argued that racism was “an endemic part of American life, deeply engrained

through the historical consciousness and ideological choices about race” (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 9). Consequently, racism has directly formed the legal system in America. Therefore, one should not view racism as simply acts of individual discrimination that can be erased from society, as was the presumption by previous civil rights attorneys. Civil rights attorneys conducted law under the assumption that integration with Whites would improve the social condition of oppressed people of color (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Integration with Whites included, among other things, integrated education. However, even Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his 1967 “The Other America” speech addressed to Stanford University, sadly acknowledged the discourse that civil rights laws created. He recognized that the fight for civil rights “was a fight for dignity” and had somehow led to re-centered racism, as it was displayed in the institutional and structural racism in education, housing, and jobs that was discussed in this study. Critical Race theorists, therefore, call to question the effectiveness of civil rights laws (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Critical Race Theory engages in “undressing the law” to find the intended nature of the law, particularly institutional and structural racism (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Winant, 1993). This is the essential element of this study: to uncover the object and nature of the Chicago district school policy and the legal doctrine that affected my life.

Furthermore, CRT theorists attempted to uncover the true concept of color-blind interpretations of the law or meritocracy. Critical Race Theory scholars believe these representations are merely White European control of the social and structural arrangements of American social status (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Elsewhere in this study, I wrote that the Chicago Public School district denied that the school policy was discriminatory. Despite this claim, the fact remained, however, that inequitable distributions of educational services for African-American students was less than that of White students (Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007). This

study employed the interpretive framework of CRT to unmask the historical, ideological, psychological, and social context in which racism was declared not to be a factor in my and other African-American students' education.

**Narratives.** The use of narratives in CRT presents a different interpretation of the law, as Delgado indicates (as cited in Parker & Lynn, 2002). More importantly, narratives are used to justify an ideology of racism and permit the listeners to see the world through the perspectives of someone at the bottom of the law (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Matsuda (1987, as cited in Parker and Lynn, 2002), said that stories of victims were legitimate because they were real connections from the past and because they allowed the listeners to view how the law protects the legal interest of White European Americans over people of color. Critical Race theorists hope to transform perceptions of racism and the law in an effort to gain justice (Williams, 1991, as cited in Lynn, 2002).

**Postmodern and Feminist theories.** Parker and Lynn acknowledge the similarities in postmodern theory and CRT. Both reject traditional legal realism and rely on the perspective and context of evaluating the truth (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Both reject established doctrine that has universal meanings. They differ in that CRT theorists disagree with the notion that justice can be theoretical. However, there are theories that intersect with CRT. Feminism legal theory, for example, is considered to be an expansion of CRT (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Feminism is a political project, but feminists seek to create a just world for women by valuing their experiences and uncovering their subdued knowledge (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Feminist standpoint epistemology is one perspective of feminism. It is "based on the assumption that in a hierarchically structured social world, different standpoints are necessarily produced" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 23). Similarly, Critical Race theorists suggest that the United States has

an extensive history of racial inequality in politics, economics, and education. This constitutes an environment that is hierarchically structured along legal lines based on race (Crenshaw, 1988; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker & Lynn, 2002). According to Crenshaw (1988), the experience of women of color intersect with racism and sexism. Women of color have two identities distinct to their life experience: race and gender (Parker & Lynn, 2002). The two cannot exist outside of the other. Other scholars suggest that people cannot be reduced to one characteristic such as race (Hill-Collins, 1990). Researchers are cautioned to therefore consider the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality. Even though some of these characteristics are conflicting, it is suggested that the researcher be attentive on how these characteristics intersect (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Hill-Collins, 1990).

**Whiteness as property.** As I continued on my journey of research, I tried to make meaning of the social injustice that I experienced in my education in Chicago by incorporating the argument presented by Cheryl Harris, (1993), a pioneer in Critical Legal Studies and a professor of law. Her work elaborated on why political and legal claims for justice had been inadequately addressed. Harris argued that the law failed to recognize the system of racial domination, specifically the concept of White racial identity interrelated to property rights. Whiteness as property is the notion that the rights to possession, use and enjoyment, and exclusion have been almost exclusively for White people (J. D. Dixon, 2004).

Harris (1993) contends that “in ways so entrenched, the assumptions, privileges, and benefits that accompany the status of being white have become a valuable asset that whites sought to protect” (p. 1713). These privileges have been affirmed and protected by law, and American law has acknowledged a property interest in whiteness that now forms the framework of legal disputes. Simply put, Harris “investigates the relationship between concepts of race and

property and reflect on how rights in property are contingent on, intertwined with, and conflated with race” (p. 1914).

Historically, the origin of property rights, as Harris points out, is rooted in racial domination. For example, it was not the concept of race that solely operated to dominate Blacks and Native Americans. Rather, it was the interaction between race and property that played the most crucial role in establishing racial and economic subordination. Moreover, according to Harris (1993), exploitation of Black labor was set forth by treating Black people as property. “Only Blacks were subjugated as slaves and treated as objects of property” (Harris, 1993, p. 1716). Thus, race and property became interrelated and established. Similarly, the removal of Native Americans was ratified by the law by acknowledging the property rights of Whites in Native American land, and as Harris argues, only White possession of land was validated and therefore privileged as a basis for property rights. These two examples of exploitation illustrate the construction of whiteness as property.

Furthermore, the construction of White identity and the ideology of racial hierarchy was tied to the system of chattel slavery. Slavery was in part an answer to White labor. The social relation was then a paradigm. It was this: not all Africans were slaves in America, yet all slaves were not White. What evolved, therefore, was a classification system that deemed one enslavable if one had Negro blood (no matter the fractual amount) (Harris, 1993). Black racial identity was marked as one who was subject to be enslaved, and White racial identity was marked as free or, as Harris puts it, at least not a slave.

In addition, Harris (1993) contended that slavery produced a strange combined category of property and humanity that was reflective of treatment and the ratification of the law. For instance, the dual character of slaves as both property and person was demonstrated in the

Representation Clause of the Constitution. Representation in the House of Representatives was allocated on the basis of population by counting all persons and “three-fifths of all other persons,” i.e., slaves. The question was then posed to the House of Representatives, “Upon what principle is it that slaves shall be computed in the representation? Are they men? Then make them citizens and let them vote? Are they property? Why then is no other property included?” (Harris, 1993, p. 1719). So it was established in law that being White was a presumption of being a whole man and protected from being a slave. Being Black was a presumption of being less than a man and a slave. Thus, whiteness was a protection from becoming a form of property—a slave, the ultimate devaluation, as Harris points out. The racial lines were extremely significant because the absence of such meant Whites could become property. Consequently, the system of slavery was contingent on and combined with racial identity. It was critical to be “White” because whiteness was the characteristic or the property of being a free human being. So historically, “slavery linked the privilege of whites to subordination of Blacks through a legal regime that attempted the conversion of Blacks into objects of property.” (Harris, 1993, p. 1721)

Harris further contends that the seizure of Black people is not merely an administration of property laws that were racist. Rather, the law has established and protected the property interest in whiteness itself. We are more familiar with the concept of property being a “thing”. But “property may consist of rights in things that are intangible, or whose existence is a matter of legal definition” (Harris, 1993, p. 1725). Property can be a right, and many theories (first possessor rules, creation of value, Lockean labor theory, etc.) categorize property beyond possession of land or one’s personality. Time does not permit me to expound on the various theories of the characteristics of property, yet one can contend that the definition of property in the classical sense is referred to as something of value that is protected. The modern definition of

property is connected to the function of property and social relations. Modern theorists define property as jobs, entitlements, occupational licenses, contracts, subsidies, labor, time, and creativity, like intellectual property.

What does whiteness as property have to do with the meaning of my experiences? Based on this concept of whiteness as property, theorists noted various ways this form of property can be emphasized in education. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), a manifestation of whiteness as property is in the form of intellectual property via school curriculum. This is evident where White students attend schools and have a wealth of curriculum offered to them. In truth, this was my experience with school curriculum. My public schools that were mostly Black had a base curriculum offering. In my Black high school in Chicago, for example, the course offerings were implemented from a remedial perspective. Algebra, English, biology, and history were the basic courses throughout the four years I was at the school, and it was rare if advanced courses were offered. By comparison, my integrated White school in the suburbs offered a rich curriculum of humanities and advanced placement programs. The work of other scholars documented the discrepancies in advanced courses offered for White and Black students (A. D. Dixon, 2006; Oakes, 1990).

Whiteness as property value is also associated with material gain (A. D. Dixon, 2006). This can be understood by examining the subsequent value of advanced courses offered in White schools. At my White suburban school, students who had the opportunity to take advanced coursework in high school benefitted from earning college credit, and consequently, they were more likely to be offered scholarships, which translates to money. Moreover, the scholarship offerings combined with advanced placement prepares White students for the best universities.

Subsequently, White students who are bestowed with intellectual property go to the best universities and obtain better paying jobs in American society.

Upon further exploration, whiteness as property can be related to education inasmuch as schools have a qualified teaching staff. This was the case in Black schools in Chicago. As this study highlights, one of the contributing factors to urban school failure was substitute teachers; devastatingly, they were full-time staff at many Black schools. Experienced and trained teachers were more expensive to hire. These experienced teachers were rarely retained in Black schools, as most were White teachers, and working conditions were harsh (Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007). Novice and substitute teachers were cheap and cost the school board less money. Upon further examination, sociologists found that in Black schools it was not uncommon to find that more than 39% of the teaching staff were full-time substitute teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1997). More specifically, the expenditure of school funds for experienced, qualified teachers in Chicago was overwhelmingly higher at White schools.

As noted in Dixon and Rousseau (2006), property differences are connected to achievement differences. CRT theorists contend that low academic student achievement is rooted in racial inequality in schools. Students in Chicago who go to a “good school” have the highest level of achievement in the city. These “good schools” are almost always those that have the highest percentage of White student enrollment (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013). As this study illustrated, historically Black students faced barriers to enroll in “good schools.” First, the schools were far from Black neighborhoods, and second, unions that controlled the schools barred Blacks from becoming members. Consider, for example, that in 1912, in early school development, the Chicago school board implemented a two-tiered system. The system consisted of a low-tier and upper-tier curriculum. The low-tier curriculum was a base curriculum that



educated the general school population for vocational labor. The upper-tier curriculum, “good schools,” by contrast educated a select few for professional work. From the onset, educators warned the board that this system “trained youth to accept lower status and blocked the social mobility which was the mark of American society” (Herrick, 1971, p. 119). This stratification system was especially detrimental to Black children’s academic achievement. Crenshaw (as cited in Dixson & Rousseau, 2006) clarified that, while race appears to be neutral, the system creates the illusion that racism is no longer the primary factor responsible for the Black underclass; instead the disparities in the Black underclass are consequences of individual and group merit in a supposedly equal system. The Chicago School Board continued a system of segregation to maintain an unequal education system (Herrick, 1971). Combined, these systems contributed to low academic achievement.

### **Bias of Researcher Revealed**

I stated in this chapter that not only was I Black, but I was also poor as a child. Upon doing this research, I tried to make meaning out of the basis for my inferior education. Upon my first attempts to make meaning of my lived experiences in education, I spent a great deal of time focused on my socio-economic background as a child. Thus, most of my research was centered on education and poverty. This was because most of the educational research literature that I came across regarding inferior education did not relate to race. As Parker and Lynn (2002) pointed out, race and racism have not been adequately addressed in educational research. This was my experience, the language in educational research journals would reference *urban students, students affected by poverty, students of lower social status, economically disadvantaged, etc.*

Indeed, my socio-economic background was an important factor in my education as it related to my involvement in an urban versus suburban curriculum. The assumption being that in the city I was poor, and in the suburbs, I was not. However, the curriculum I experienced in my Chicago public schools was inferior in comparison to my suburban schools. The phenomenon of moving from my urban school setting to a suburban setting was a turning point in my academic development, and ultimately, it was life altering. However, as I wrote elsewhere, I didn't have to travel to the suburbs for a better education. This was because the urban school district where I lived not only encompassed the worst schools in the state, but also the best ones in the state! What caused this disparity? Alas, it was where I lived in the Black segregated neighborhood that had the worst schools and the White segregated neighborhoods that had the best schools (*U.S. News & World Report*, 2015). The socio-economic factor may give an explanation to the differences that I experienced in education. However, because the history of my people and my school district was segregated and my educational experiences were unique, poverty alone cannot address the issue of inferior education in its entirety.

### **Research Design**

My research design is in the form of autoethnography. According to Creswell (2013), an autoethnography is defined as “multiple layers of consciousness, vulnerable self, coherent self, critiquing the self in social context, the subversion of dominant discourses, and the evocative potentials” (p. 2). In my research, I include personal stories about my life as an urban, African American student attending Chicago Public Schools and the larger cultural meaning of my experiences outside of school.

## **Research Participants and Site**

In this study, I explore my personal lived experience as a student in Chicago Public Schools. I chose to explore my personal experiences because they reveal a history of problems in education for urban African Americans and other marginalized people in American society. Wolcott (as cited in Creswell, 2013) believes that a good starting point for an ethnography is the description of a culture-sharing group and setting. I seek to explore the era between 1970 and 1980 in Chicago on the far south side among a segregated group of African Americans, as few Whites lived there. I recall a White woman, a wife to a Black serviceman, lived near me. Besides my teachers, who were mostly White, (but never lived in the community), the community was segregated.

In this chapter, I present a straightforward description of the setting and events in the community I grew up in. The community was nurturing and family orientated. Unlike the current perception of poor African Americans, during this time of my life, the African American community in Chicago was not violent. Generally speaking, I recall that there were two parent family units and some extended families with grandparents. I was loved by my mother, father, grandparents, and aunts and uncles, as all lived within blocks of me. Children were taught to respect elders, and it was considered shameful for children to be without manners. Mothers would visit the schools unexpectedly, noticeably peering into the classroom monitoring their children's school behavior. Parents valued how their children represented them in public!

## **Source of Data and Method of Data Analysis**

In this research, the source of my data was my personal lived experiences and personal communication with my mother. In the framework of CRT, narratives are used to justify an ideology of racism and permit the listeners to see the world through the perspectives of someone

at the bottom of the law (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Matsuda (1987) said that stories of victims were legitimate because they were real connections from the past. Furthermore, I collected historical data regarding school policy and structural racism.

I initially began to collect the data for this study by first validating the historical significance of the stories my parents told me. My mother told me stories about my father's experiences of racial injustice in a segregated Chicago school. He was one of the few Blacks who was permitted to attend Washburn Trade School in Chicago in 1968. She had said that the instructors, who were White men, would instruct the White students about how to use shop equipment, but they would withhold instruction from Black students. As I mentioned in the literature review, Washburn was at the center of controversy, as it was a Chicago Public School controlled by labor unions that barred Blacks from attending. In 2012, I decided to research Washburn Trade School mainly because my mother said that my father became bitter after attending Washburn. I wanted to examine the true intent of the school board's policy because the framework of CRT engages in "undressing the law" to find the intended nature of the law, particularly institutional and structural racism (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Winant, 1993). Although it was an unpleasant environment, Washburn was a historical milestone in my father's education and ultimately his life.

Upon learning the story about Washburne and the barriers created to keep Blacks out of the school, I decided to turn my attention to the Chicago Public School district. I was curious to find out if the segregated policies that had existed at Washburn were systematic. However, instead of reading the documents from the past, I focused on present day school reform and how it was affecting urban schools. I took notice of the education reform because it was affecting my children. I read *Blueprint for Reform the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary*

*Education Act of 2010* (ESEA), which the Obama administration had implemented. The ESEA gave me the information I needed to conceptualize the charter school movement in Chicago. I read books by social justice scholars and activists like William Watkins (2004), who wrote books that confronted corporate school reform. Eventually, one book led to another. Neckerman's (2007) book addressed the roots of failure in Chicago Schools. This book led to my journey back into the past to research the history of Chicago School policies.

### **Validation Criteria and Researcher's Self**

In this research, I reveal layers of my conscious thoughts. During my early years as a teacher, my mother lived with me, and I would converse with her about my urban Hispanic students, as they very much mirrored me 30 years ago. My mother would become emotional on subjects related to my education and children of color. She was convinced that the public school system in Chicago was designed to oppress me and all children of color. Upon becoming an educator and after having conversations with my mother, I gained clarity on what my mother's goals were for my life.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

In the beginning of this research, I examined the history of restricted housing policy in Chicago and how it was interrelated with segregated schools. In another section of this research, I provided a narrative of my personal lived experience as it was the counter-story to the history. Critical Race Theory is regarded as a "discourse generated by legal scholars of color devoted to uncovering the hidden subtext of race in society" (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 9). I provided a different explanation of school policy via the use of counter-storytelling—an autoethnography. Other research has been conducted in regards to the problems with urban schools, but I would argue that authenticity of the research is influenced by the lived experience of the researcher.

It is my analysis that the hierarchical powers of school institutions are not designed to protect people of color (Matsuda, 1987 as cited in Parker & Lynn, 2002). Even today, the same system of segregation and inferior schools continues and is achieved because of the history of racism and residential segregation that is salient in Chicago. Other researchers argue that social class is the reason for the disparity that exists in Chicago Public Schools. Although I agree that social class disparity is a factor in education, I cannot ignore the current race statistics in Chicago Schools. For example, the Chicago Public Schools website on demographics illustrated that the district's White students comprise less than 10 percent of the district's population (Chicago Public Schools, 2016). Yet despite their low population, Whites are the highest percentage of the population in the best schools in Chicago.

Critical Race Theory scholars like Rousseau (2006) analyze the situation best by writing that the factors of residential segregation and education are interrelated. The type of residential segregation seen in Chicago is the "institutional apparatus that supports other racially discriminatory processes and binds them together into a coherent and uniquely effective system of racial subordination" (Massey & Denton, 1993, p. 8, cited in Rousseau, 2006). To put it another way, residential segregation creates barriers for Blacks and other minorities to have access to a quality education (Shapiro, 2004, cited in Rousseau, 2006).

As Rousseau (2006) wrote, Whites believe that equal opportunity is the rule and that free market operates fairly without partiality. If this perception was true, then "material differences between whites and blacks represent differences in merit" (p. 124). However, I would conclude with the analysis of Crenshaw (1998, as cited in Rousseau, 2006) when he wrote that the focus on social class and the myth of equal opportunity "diverts the attention from racial subordination while at the same time justifying continuing inequity" (p. 124). The point is that the social class

of the student alone does not explain the different results of schools, because we do not operate in a system of equal opportunity (Rousseau, 2006).

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Analysis**

This chapter contains data in the form of narratives of my personal memories and conversations of my family history and my shared African American cultural interaction in my segregated neighborhood. Delgado and Stefanic (1991, as cited in Dixson and Rousseau, 2006) describe the intention and goal of racially-specific narratives as to “offer insights into the particulars lives lived at the margins of society thereby... uncovering a more layered reality than is immediately apparent” (p. 192). In addition, the use of narratives in Critical Race Theory (CRT), according to Delgado (2001, as cited in Parker & Lynn, 2002), presents a different interpretation of the law insomuch as they are used to justify an ideology of racism and permit listeners to see the world through the perspective of someone at the bottom of the law (Parker & Lynn, 2002). This study examined in detail the legacy of education policies related to racial inequality and segregation that created inferior schools in Chicago. The purpose of this essay is to provide a historical background of Chicago’s restrictive housing policy and the subsequent development and maintenance of segregated schools. I use my personal lived experiences via an autoethnography to expound on how my education intersected with the policies and economics of the time.

### **Manifold Identities (My Bias)**

I hold a degree in history, consequently I obtained knowledge for this research via a historical lens. In addition, I am an educator, and as such, I provide instruction to children and have a deep interest in the quality of their learning. In this study, via the use of counter-storytelling I provided a historical explanation of school policy as it related to my experiences. In CRT scholarship, counter-story is a methodology that focuses on the stories and experiences of



students of color, thereby “exposing and analyzing stories of racial privilege” (Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002, as cited in Dixon & Rousseau, 2006, p. 35). What I learned in the process of research and inquiry was that my identity in this study was manifold. Schwandt (2014) wrote that the qualitative inquirer as “bricoleur” is capable of donning multiple identities. Not only did I have identities of storyteller, researcher, historian, and scholar, but also I importantly had the identity of participant in this research. Specifically, the object of this research explored the historical and political dimensions of the education of Blacks in a segregated, urban, poor community, and I myself as the researcher was situated in this experience. As the participant, I also felt like I had been the victim of an unjust political and social system, but I survived the oppression: “Still I rise” (Angelou, 1978).

I asked myself, “Why was I chosen to survive when so many other people in my community did not?” Ultimately, a failed education produces the cycle of poverty that continues for generations in Chicago in segregated, poor, African American communities. During the process of inquiry for this study, I became focused on my purpose in life. I wrote in Chapter 3 that by divine grace I left a failing school and attended one of the best suburban schools in the region. It happened because my father had the opportunity to barter his skill in carpentry in exchange for an apartment in an affluent school district that ultimately allowed me to attend a “good” school, which led to my academic success. What is the purpose of my survival? As I continued to examine the research for this study, I began to understand it. I began to feel as though I was on a mission, one that had been commissioned by my ancestors: to uncover the truth. As a storyteller, I revealed to the reader my experiences, but as a researcher and scholar, I gained insight into education policies that influenced my community and uncovered the depth of their effect. As a historian, I discovered a pattern of restrictive housing policies that led to

oppressive education policies, both of which were imposed upon African Americans and other people of color. As a participant, I felt as though my ancestors were cheering me on to expose the hidden curriculum that caused far too many injustices to not just my beloved people, but the entire American society.

### **The Great Migration**

During the course of this research, it became clear to me (although I had knowledge) that not only was my generation of African Americans oppressed by school board policies, but also my ancestors were amongst those oppressed by Chicago school policies from the 1940s to the 1970s. Previously, I discussed the rapidly growing Black population in Chicago and restrictive housing policies that sought to segregate them into specific parts of the city. Learning this was very personal to me because both my paternal and maternal grandparents were among the thousands of African Americans who migrated from the South to Chicago, causing a population boom in the 1940s. Specifically, my grandparents relocated from Mississippi and Alabama to Chicago, and as I wrote in the literature review, they were restricted to living in the Black Belt on the Southside of Chicago. Thus, they were segregated from the rest of the city. In addition, my grandparents were included with the thousands of African American people who were denied equal access to jobs and equal pay.

The historical account of the Great Migration is detailed in Nicholas Lemann's (1991) work, *The Promised Land*. Lemann explained that "between 1910 and 1970 six and a half million Black Americans moved from the South to the North; five million of them moved after 1940, during the time of the mechanization of cotton farming" (p16-17). The black migration changed America in so much that, according to Lemman, it was

one of the largest and fastest mass movement of people that wasn't caused by threat of execution or starvation. It outnumbered the migration of Italians or Irish, or Jews or Poles to the United States. Consequently, up until the time of the Black Migration race was primarily an issue for the South. As Lemann (1991) noted, only the South had to contend with "the contradiction between national creed of democracy and the local reality of a caste system" (p.16-17). The Black Migration made race a national problem for the twentieth century as it became an integral part of politics and social thought. Race relation was the one thing that was clearly wrong with America (Lemann, The promised land: the great Black migration and how it changed America, 1991).

### **My Father/White Hostility**

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, when Blacks tried to integrate into White neighborhoods, they were met with violence from White residents. This information was not new to me, as I had personal knowledge about actual events that happened to my family. In fact, Hirsh (1998) explained that the racial violence in Chicago was related to desegregation. He wrote, "All the riots that I unearthed in the immediate postwar period had a common impulse: Each resulted from the shifting of racial residential boundaries in modern Chicago" (p. 16-17). Researching and reading about hatred and oppression imposed on my own people lead me to wonder how my life might have been different if I had not been Black. I thought mostly about my father. He was bitter when relating his life experience in Chicago. In 1972, he was violently attacked by a group of White young men when he was found in a very hostile White neighborhood in Chicago, Bridgeport. During that time, residents in Bridgeport had a notorious reputation for violence toward Blacks who crossed into their neighborhood. He went there to help a friend whose car had broken down when a group of men came out of a local bar and attacked them both. My

father was close to death, and he spent two weeks in the hospital. He was a good father who I credit with shaping my personality, but he was angry too. I never completely understood why until I did this research. As I wrote in the literature review, the school that my father attended in Chicago was a white segregated school. My mind traveled back to that time, and I tried to conceptualize how strong my father's will must have been to endure attending that school as a young, Black man in Chicago circa 1960. Herrick (1971) and Neckerman(2007) both wrote about the bitter racial contention in Chicago schools in the 1960 era. What did it feel like to be treated as "inferior" when everyone around him was thriving? I would at times burst into tears at my laptop or in a book and say to myself, "My poor Daddy, I'm sorry you had to experience that."

### **My Slave Ancestors/ Sharecroppers**

When I was a child, my maternal grandmother lived a few blocks from my house, and my constant interaction with her is relative to my lived experiences and this research. In this section, I include stories she told me, which are important because they relate the oral history of my ancestors, who were slaves. My grandmother's story focuses specifically on her life in the South on cotton plantations, where she lived circa 1922-1940.

When I was a little girl, every day my siblings, my cousins, and I walked to school, and those walks always included a stop at grandma's house before and after school. (Figures 1, 2, and 3 show images of me, my grandma, siblings, and cousins from my childhood.) She lived directly across the street from the public school. We sat at the kitchen table, ate rice and bacon for breakfast, sipped coffee (yes, grandma served us coffee and cream before school), and listened to the oral history of our ancestors. Her grandfather had been born a slave, but when he was seven years old, soldiers on horses from the North (Civil War Union soldiers) came to the

Mississippi plantation on which he lived to inform my great-grandfather and the other slaves that the war was over and they were free. As it was, plantations were geographically isolated, and I know as a historian that although slaves ran away to fight in the war as Union soldiers, most of them had little contact with the world outside of the plantation. In fact, some slaves would have never left the plantation in their lifetime. According to Lemann (1991), he wrote that every big plantation was a “fiefdom”, where all business was done at the plantation headquarters instead of in a town. Therefore, slaves would not have known about the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 that freed all slaves even though Lincoln had signed it in 1862, almost three years before the war ended. In fact, Juneteenth is a holiday recognized by some as it commemorates the June 19, 1865 announcement of the abolition of slavery. Ultimately, some former slaves migrated North upon learning of their new freedom. However, my great-grandfather stayed on the cotton plantation and worked as a sharecropper.



*Figure 1.* Grandma and her grandchildren circa 1978. That’s me standing behind grandma.



*Figure 2. Me with my brother and sister in Altgeld Gardens circa 1974.*



*Figure 3. Me with my cousins and sister on Easter Sunday at Grandma's house in Altgeld Gardens circa 1980. (I'm wearing the hat.)*

It was estimated that my grandmother was born in 1922 to sharecroppers. (She had no written record of her birth, but its date was known by elders.) All able-bodied family members were required to work. Initially, my grandmother stayed home to watch the baby of an aunt, but circa 1927, my grandmother worked, picking cotton in fields on the plantation. At the age of five, she was obligated to meet a quota: one bale of cotton each day. This was labor intensive work, even for adults. Seldom did she attend school because it was mandatory that everyone work in the fields, even children. On the rare occasion when my grandmother attended school, I recall her saying that she did not own a pair of shoes and that she walked a “few miles” to get to the local school house. The school was a one-room cabin that all grade levels shared. At other times, when her family lived on another plantation, the school was too far away to walk to, so she didn’t attend school. In other accounts (Lemann,1991), sharecroppers’ schools were usually plantation owned and were shut down by planters when work was needed in the fields. Plantation schools were segregated and received worn books from the white schools. Some accounts of sharecroppers reported that they only went to school when it rained so sharecropper children attended school four or five months a year (Lemann, *The promised land: the great Black migration and how it changed America*, 1991).

My grandmother was 14 when she completed third grade. It was during that time that she married and began living with her husband and his family on a different plantation. My grandmother and her family would work one plantation, then go to another for better opportunities: more food, better living conditions, school for children. Grandma said they didn’t actually receive money for their labor. Sharecroppers labored all year long on plantations only for food and the opportunity to pay rent on run-down cabins that were previously slave quarters. When the crop came in, they were not paid, as they accumulated debt by living on the plantation.

Another account of the sharecropping system was an account of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. visiting sharecroppers on an Alabama plantation in 1965, and was amazed that they had never seen United States currency (Lemann, *The Promised Land The Great Black Migration And How It Changed America*, 1991). Thus, she lived an oppressed and impoverished life in the South with little hope of change for herself or her children.

My grandmother left her husband and the cotton plantation. She was 22 years old and had only two children when she migrated to Chicago around 1940. She had been sent for by her brother, who had already been in the city for a few years and who lived in the Black Belt. Ironically, she came to live in a housing complex on the Southside of Chicago. Unlike the present-day negative image of Chicago's housing projects, my grandmother gave accounts of a beautiful, quiet, family-centered community that was safe in the 1940s and 1950s. I imagine that living in Chicago housing projects during that era was a much better life in comparison to the cotton plantation she left in rural Mississippi.

Previously, I highlighted restrictive housing policies in Chicago and covenant agreements that created segregated neighborhoods and barriers for African Americans to obtain housing. According to a 1947 Chicago Housing Authority report,

One of the reasons for the housing plight of the Negroes is restrictive covenants which blocked the production of new houses for them on vacant land in anything like the number required. These restrictions almost completely prohibit the use by Negroes of vacancies in the existing homes outside of their "ghettos" and the only area where Negroes housing construction can take place are those already occupied by Negroes. (as cited in Lesueur, 2010, p.1)



The Chicago Housing Authority built public housing projects to relieve the overcrowded conditions in the Black Belt. The Black Belt was where most of the Black population resided in Chicago. It was a span of about 30 blocks and existed from the 1920s until the 1960s (Spear, 1967) (Lemann, 1991) (Hirsh, 1983,1998). These housing projects were a political and social project to segregate and exclude Blacks from the city; two generations of my family came to live in them (Hirsh, 1983, 1998). Our specific housing projects, Altgeld Gardens and Murray Homes, were isolated away from the city, built as segregated housing for Black World War II veterans and the rapidly expanding African American community. The building site was on the southern border of the city limits in the midst of a toxic waste site. Hirsh (1983) explained in his historical account of the development of the urban ghetto that “public policy played a key role in fostering, sustaining... intensifying the separation of the races” (p. 9).

Both my paternal and maternal grandparents bore many children who attended segregated public schools in the Chicago housing projects. My mother came from a family of 10 children and my father from a family of 6. My mother and father were 11 and 12 years old respectively when they first met each other on the playground in the 1960s, as they were neighbors and schoolmates. In 1970, they married, and I was born in 1971. My extended family—grandmothers, grandfather, aunts, uncles, and cousins—all had apartments in the community, so literally a village of my relatives was always constantly in my life as a child, and there were a lot of us! My maternal grandmother alone had over 50 grandchildren, and she had many more great-grandchildren, but we were by no means the largest family in the community. The projects were abundant with families similar to mine: two-parent homes, extended families. My parents and their siblings all attended the same public school in Chicago that my siblings and I did.

I didn't know I was poor. When I tell people where I lived as a child in Chicago, the shock that comes across their faces amuses me. I'm sure they see images of gun violence, drugs, and gangs. That was not my life. I am very proud of who I am and where I come from because I was above all things loved. I was loved by my father and my mother. Grandma loved me, my aunts loved me, and my uncles loved me. When people ask me about my childhood, I tell them I was loved. I was protected, and I felt safe. Where I lived, unlike today in Chicago, it was safe to play outside. Adjacent to my family's apartment was the playground and the basketball court. Even the young men who played on the court watched out for me and other kids on the block! They would scold us if we did anything wrong and would inform my parents, as my father and mother were highly respected in the community. We girls would "jump rope" (i.e., we played Double Dutch). We had fun. We were safe. It wasn't until my parents moved out of the projects, away from my community, that my poverty became visible to me.

#### Chicago Public Schools and my Mother's Lack of Trust

As a child, it did not initially occur to me that I attended a failing school. I thought all schools were like mine, and I thought all parents did what my parents did: sent their children to public school and homeschooled their children about their heritage. My mother homeschooled me and my siblings because she didn't trust Chicago Public Schools to properly educate us, mainly because my public school was overcrowded, lacked materials and books, and had a shortage of qualified teachers.

My earliest memory of school was being in mobile classrooms. As I highlighted in the literature review, Chicago Public Schools were so overcrowded that mobile classrooms (Willis wagons) were parked outside in the school playground, and classes were held on double shifts. Although my classroom wasn't one of the mobile ones, I recall visiting them with my mother.

My mother participated in parent program, and she took me along. The parents had meetings in the mobile homes.

**Overcrowding.** My experiences in third grade are my most vivid memories of school in Chicago. My neighborhood school was Carver Elementary School. There were five massive buildings on the school campus, not including the Carver High School building. They were called A building, B building, C building, D building, and E building. These buildings were overcrowded with elementary students. The E building had previously been the high school, but because of the growing African American population, the new Carver High School was built, and the E building was then used to accommodate elementary-level children. I remember the C building had writing on its front stone façade that read “Built 1949.” Mobile classrooms had been on the campus, but they were gone, and although there were five buildings on the campus, the school remained overcrowded. As I wrote in the literature review, during the 1970s most Black children in Chicago attended a school that was so overcrowded that double shifts were implemented. This was the case at Carver Elementary School.

Maybe it was because I was a little girl, but there seemed to be an ocean of kids in every direction you turned. I knew the way to walk in the crowd because I knew the school grounds, but I couldn’t see the buildings because there were so many children. I had to hold my younger sister's hand and drop her off at the C building, then go to the D building across the street. The buildings were adjacent to one another but not in close proximity for a small child.

**Lack of resources and rigor.** I remember feeling scared and anxious at school. Some of the kids were mean, but most of my anxiety was because of the school environment. I felt lonely and isolated. I don’t remember interacting with other students, and I don’t remember having recess or gym. Also, I hated the lunchroom—it was dilapidated, and I received free lunch. The

lunchroom was also the gym and the assembly hall. I guess that was the result of an overcrowded school. It was depressing.

My third-grade teacher was a very large, Black woman who wobbled when she walked. I can't recall a time when she addressed me by my name. I can't recall a time when she assisted me with an assignment. I mostly recall that she sat at her desk and ate food. She did not address the class to do an assignment. She just sat at her desk all day. She assigned the class homework: write your name 10 times. My mother was enraged by this lack of academic rigor and visited the school. She brought my baby sister and escorted me to my classroom. The teacher told my mother that she assigned the name-writing homework because our class did not have books. My mother inquired about when the books might arrive. I'm not sure what the teacher's response was, but I remember my mother visiting the teacher's store to buy books after their meeting.

I remember having "walking reading" in third grade. I went to another teacher besides my homeroom teacher for reading. My reading teacher was a nice lady. She was older, Black lady, like my grandma. She was wholesome, and she knew my name. I think that I was with the smart group because the kids in the class were older than me. I remember that we would take turns reading, then have a discussion. I enjoyed reading class. We had "walking math" also. I must have been in the smart class again because all the kids were older than me, and I remember the teacher: she was White and tall with long, straight blond hair with a part down the middle. However, she was only nice to smart kids. I was not as smart in math. If a student answered incorrectly, she would humiliate them in front of the class. I was nervous every day after lunch in anticipation of being in the classroom with that cruel, White lady.

**Parental instruction.** I wrote previously that Black children had an instructional deficit because of overcrowding and a lack of qualified teachers. I think this was the problem with my

school. In addition, it was reported that at some Black schools nearly 40% of the teaching staff were substitute teachers (Neckerman, 2007). I think this is what prompted my mother to begin home schooling her children. I remember my mother said that it was hard to retain good teachers at my school, so I attended my neighborhood public school, then after school I went home to do more schoolwork with my mother.

My mother visited teacher's stores to buy workbooks for us to have as homework. My siblings and I sat at the kitchen table, and my mother assigned us various assignments from the books she had purchased for us, reading and math. She always purchased workbooks one to two grade levels above our grade level to challenge us. She was diligent, implementing good academic study habits in her children. She insisted that we pay attention and work hard. She was angry when we were not being attentive to her academic instruction. She always said that she wanted us to have options in life and to not be like her.

In the literature review, Shujaa (1996) wrote that Black people in particular needed to learn about the legacy of their own people before integrating with other people. My parents resisted the public school curriculum and demanded that my siblings and I know our heritage. I believe, as Shujaa wrote, that my parents' actions to help us gain knowledge empowered me and my siblings. For example, my father bought us books about Dr. King and Malcom X and assigned us readings about our African American heritage. Then, we gave him oral reports on these readings. To me, it seemed to be a lot of work coupled with attending the public school. Nonetheless, my siblings and I developed a passion to learn about our African American heritage, and I believe it was a major factor in our academic success.



*Figure 4. Me at home in Altgeld Gardens circa 1982.*



*Figure 5. Me standing in front of my house in Altgeld Gardens in 1985 on the day I graduated from 8<sup>th</sup> grade.*

**Emotional wellness in school.** My mother stopped homeschooling us when I attended high school, mostly because she lacked the academic knowledge of what to teach adolescents, and my parents were too poor to hire a tutor for us. My first year of high school, I attend a small, Christian school that I hated. It was disorganized and lacked funding. It was a disgrace and should have been closed. (Eventually, it was). My mother removed me from that school, but I knew why she sent me there despite the fact that the school was not academically challenging. It was because it was safer than Carver High School, my neighborhood public high school. By this time, gangs were growing increasingly violent in my community, as I remember hearing about shootings. Although street gangs always had a presence in the community, up until that time I don't recall them being violent. I remember gangs existing within the community to protect Black people from the brutality of the police and other outside forces, but violence within the community had become more prevalent.

I believe safety was a major concern for my mother in relation to my education and something that I think is somehow overlooked by policy makers. Parents without viable choices will almost always choose to have their children safe rather than well educated. It is a matter of survival for people who live in Chicago and are faced with violence in and around school buildings. This argument is absurd to some, but the point is that there was the threat of rising gang violence in my community when I entered high school in 1985. As I mentioned earlier, my parents made every effort to protect me and my siblings. My mother valued education, but she did not have the skills to homeschool me for high school, and she refused to let me attend the neighborhood public high school. Although the Christian school did not have staff or funding to properly administrate a school, for the sake of safety my mother chose to send me to the Christian school. However, I did not remain there for long since my father was offered an

apartment in the suburbs in exchange for work. As is revealed in Chapter 3, White suburban schools have a more rigorous curriculum than urban Black schools.

**Challenges in education.** When I was 15, my parents finally escaped the projects and moved to a middle-class, suburban community north of Chicago, during which time its schools were said to have been some of the best in the nation. Imagine the culture shock a young girl from Chicago had coming from the projects to Evanston Township High School. Immediately, I noticed the difference between the Chicago Public School and my new school. Visibly, I could see that there were up-to-date books for all students. In the projects, I remember sharing old, outdated books. In the projects, there was broken tile on the bathroom floor and peeling paint on the cafeteria walls. More importantly, the course offerings were different. For example, in Chicago, math courses were pre-algebra, algebra, and geometry, and in Evanston Township High School, math courses were algebra I, geometry, algebra II, trigonometry, pre-calculus, and calculus. I was confident in my academic abilities and learned quickly; however, I faced academic challenges. My parents had instilled in me the value of hard work, so I knew that whatever challenges I faced at my new school, I could conquer them if I worked hard. With the help of an English teacher who took time to tutor me during her lunch period, I was successful at my new school and was inducted into the National Honor Society. Ironically, my parents eventually bought property in Chicago and my siblings and I graduated from Chicago High Schools.

Attending a school outside of my segregated public school made me consciously aware of my poverty. I had not realized it before because in my mind, poor people were homeless and without family. Had my parents not escaped the projects and moved into a middle-class community, my siblings and I would have never received a proper education. I would have borne



children in the projects where my parents met and where I had been born, eventually leading to a third generation of children born into a vicious cycle of unequal public education and, ultimately, poverty. Drawing from my lived experience, I learned that where I lived, whether in the city or suburbs, I experienced a different public education. It was visibly noticeable to me that there was disinvestment in my Chicago school.



*Figure 6.* Our high school graduation in 1989. My academically gifted sister skipped a grade, setting her on track with me for graduation. My father and mother, grandma, sister, and cousin are in this photo with me.

## **Conclusion**

My narrative of my personal memories and my family history was an insight into my life in a polarized city, and as such, my education intersected with the policies and economics of the time. Schools in Chicago were segregated by race due to residential housing restrictions. I and my family were among many Blacks who were affected by public housing programs that were designed to maintain patterns of segregation (Hirsch, 1983)

I reflect and ask myself how my life might have been different had my family not been Black. I concluded that my parents had done what they could do to offer me a better life than theirs. They had not cheated me; the public school system had failed me because of the effect of structural racism on public education in Chicago. Had my parents not moved to the suburbs, my life would have been a life of poverty living in the projects. My children would have also had a life of attending failing public schools, and their children would have continued the cycle. My education, or schooling as Shujaa (1996) wrote, was manipulated by the interests of powerful people and implemented for them by the public school board. However, my mother's resistance saved my life; consequently, the education that I received from Evanston Township High School afforded me the opportunity to break the cycle and live a middle-class life. I was blessed that my parents provided me with a way to escape the oppressive grip of racial inequality, breaking a cycle for my generation.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Discussion**

Although American schools were successful in assimilating European immigrants and their descendants, this has not been the case for nonwhites. Orfield (2013) pointed out the fact that Indians, African-Americans, and people of Mexican origin in the United States received little education until well into the twentieth century is an indication of historical educational barriers facing nonwhite people. This research seeks to examine how race was related to the failing schools that I attended in Chicago in the years 1974 – 1989.

Numerous studies have focused on education reform and the problem of failing urban schools. This study raised awareness of the historical roots of racial inequality in failing schools and how it relates to Black and Latino students locked into inferior schools today. The intersection of education and race seems to be dismissed by policy makers in lieu of current school reform efforts. Education policies are developed via misguided and sometimes well-intended ideology of these reform efforts, yet there has been minimal treatment of failing schools from the perspective of race.

The 1964 Civil Rights Act was enacted to bring the power of the executive branch to enforce desegregation because integration plans to provide equality of education had become the burden of nonwhite families. Specific guidelines and civil rights protections were set forth into law to ensure that plans for integration were adhered to, such as *United States of America v. Board of Education of the City of Chicago*, which was enacted in 1980. Without these protections, barriers kept Black children and other children of color from integrating into the best schools. These barriers have not disappeared (Orfield, 2013).

The history of inequality in Chicago schools relates, of course, to social status; nonetheless, as Neckerman (2007) wrote, education of Blacks has its own distinctive trajectory. In comparison, the turn-of-the-century European immigrant may have initially encountered discrimination, but this diminished over time, thereby allowing subsequent generations to assimilate into mainstream American society. As Neckerman's work illustrates, education was more critical for Blacks because of the salience of racial exclusions in the job market and among labor unions, leading to subsequent restriction of economic opportunity and disparity. As Dixson and Rousseau (2006) explained, "To separate race from class is to ignore the historical and contemporary role of residential segregation in the economic and educational cycle" (p. 123).

The history of Chicago housing policy is significant to this research because it allows the reader to connect with the legacy of Chicago and gain a vivid understanding of the present state of Chicago Public Schools, the third largest school district in the United States. There is no question that students were segregated by race in Chicago schools. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, housing policy and covenant agreements were structural and systematic and restricted Blacks to live in the Black Belt (a span of 30 blocks). School boundaries were gerrymandered to maintain the racial divide in the district (Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007; Orfield, 1978). In addition, a dual-curriculum system was created that gave White students access to selective schools and nonwhites were concentrated to the lowest tiers especially in the high schools (Grossman, Meza, Nagda, & Murphy, 2018; Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007; Orfield, 1996, 2013). Illinois law prohibited legal racial segregation, so in the case of Chicago, as Neckerman (2007) pointed out, inequality and discrimination "emerged through a myriad of small actions" (p. 175). Overcrowding in Black schools was a major factor that contributed to inequality in

Chicago school districts. The school board could have lessened inequality by changing the school boundary lines to allow Black students to attend neighboring White schools. By 1930, Black community protest of school overcrowding was not successful but did attract allies among the city's White liberals and activists (Neckerman, 2007). These organizations, Catholic Interracial Council, the Chicago Council Against Racial and Religious Discrimination, the Congress on Racial Equality, and the Mayor's Committee on Race Relations, campaigned against overcrowded Black schools and racial injustice. By 1945, a National Education Association investigation led to strong criticism of Chicago schools thereby forcing the district to seriously make an effort to desegregate, so briefly it seemed as if redistricting of the school boundaries would happen. However, White students in 1945 began to hold strikes at Englewood and Calumet high schools. They were opposed to having Black students at their schools. Neckerman (2007) and Herrick (1971) both wrote that redistricting became highly controversial inasmuch as White parents were not open to racial change. A committee overseeing the redistricting warned in 1948, "School districts are regarded in many local communities as being fixed, 'sacred entities.' Because of [White] parent resistance, redirecting was partly rescinded at one school and never implemented at another. A plan to redistrict high schools was completely scrapped" (Neckerman, 2007, p. 93). A 1967 superintendent of Chicago schools report said, "Meaningful mitigation of segregation in a city as racially polarized as Chicago will require wholesale changes in public attitudes, changes which are not readily legislated" (Herrick, 1971, p. 346).

The problem that I describe here is what some scholars call *a racial contract* (Mills, 1997) and other call a *differend* (Delgado, 1996). A *differend* is a conflict between two groups that cannot come to a resolution, causing members of the subjugated group to continue to suffer

(Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). In the Chicago case, the dominant group being the school district (and White residents) and the subjugated group being the Black community, are not taken into full account in the decision making process, causing the oppressed to continue suffering at the hands of their oppressors (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Following on the work of Delgado and Stefanic (2017), Dixson and Rousseau (2006) explained that the *differend* “occurs when a concept such as justice acquires conflicting meanings for two groups” (p. 208). In this case, White residents want to protect the status quo, and the Black community wants access to resources, and subsequently, the dominant system of justice deprived the Black residents the chance to express their grievances in terms the system would understand. In this case, the oppression “does not resonate with those who are in authority, and consequently, [the Black community’s] versions of truth are not accorded full respect when justice is meted out” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, p. 208). A foundational argument of Critical Race Theory pointed out by Bell is that of (a) the interest convergence principle, which “is built on the political history as precedent and emphasizes that significant progress for African Americans is achieved only when the goals of Blacks are consistent with the needs of Whites”; and (b) the price for racial remedies asserts that “Whites will not support civil rights policies that appear to threaten their superior social status” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, p. 130).

### **Exclusion Versus Opportunity**

It is critical for the reader to conceptualize the context of segregated schools and boundary lines “because these boundary lines circumscribe so many tangibles (resources) and intangibles (curriculum, expectations) and therefore define the opportunity schools provide” (Orfield, 2013, p. 190). Black segregated schools were plagued by disinvestment and had problems with overcrowding, inexperienced educators, dilapidated buildings, and double-

scheduled shifts. These problems were not caused by the district's lack funding (Orfield, 1978); instead, these deficits were the result of school board officials' decisions to allocate fewer funds to Black schools (Herrick, 1971; Neckerman, 2007).

Subsequently, according to Neckerman (2007), "Inequality emerged through a myriad of small actions, in both the public and private sectors.... Taken singly, these actions would appear reasonable and legally defensible. Taken together, these actions created a brutally effective system of inequality" (p. 175). This system of inequality was accomplished by both the powerful and the ordinary people of the city.

In the context of exclusion, segregation defines access to who "belongs" (Orfield, 2013). Past theories of inequality are linked to segregation and exclusion. With that in mind, consider the fact that Chicago was highly segregated in comparison to other major cities, and that still holds true today. Orfield (1978) wrote, "Chicago has the most segregated school system of any of the five cities. Mass mobilization against segregation came relatively late, but at its peak the struggle had a cast of characters and a sense of confrontation that were probably unsurpassed" (p. 158). Furthermore, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said after marching in Chicago for civil rights in 1966:

I've been in many demonstrations all across the South, but I can say that I have never seen—even in Mississippi and Alabama—mobs as hostile and as hate-filled as I've seen here in Chicago. (Grossman, 2016, para. 2)

So Chicago, from a historical context, although racially diverse, nonetheless continued to be a racially polarized city, and its school districts reflect this racial disparity (CPS, 2018; Grossman et al., 2018; Lipman, 2011; Quick, 2016). The prevalence of both residential segregation combined with discrimination in education cannot be overlooked! This type of housing

segregation seen in Chicago is “the institutional apparatus that support other racially discriminatory processes and binds them together into a coherent and uniquely effective system of racial subordination” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, p. 122), inasmuch that residential segregation restricts nonwhites from the best schools (Denton & Massey, 1993). In the context of history, exclusion was designed into the curriculum. Herrick (1971) explained that the Chicago elitist organizations decide who belongs in the best schools and who does not.

### **A Brief History**

It began in 1908 in Chicago when the industrial businesses and labor unions began to appear before the school board, eager to implement school-based industrial training. The Chicago Federation of Labor, the Commercial Club, and The National Association of Manufacturers appeared before the school board to expand “industrial education” and took legal action to impose compulsory industrial education for all Chicago Public School students (Herrick, 1971). The plan was to incorporate a dual system of non-interchangeable high schools, academic and vocational. The system required one type of school for students going into professions and another for students trained to work manually (Herrick, 1971). Teachers asserted that the two-track system “trained youth to accept lower-class status and blocked social mobility, which is the mark of American society” (Herrick, 1971, p. 119). Herrick noted that the unions accused businesses of getting “cheap and submissive labor without the educational background American citizens should have” and that “educators said that the plan wanted to train children for their convenience... and assign the poor to dead-end schools with no chance of upward mobility” (p. 119).

Consequently, students who were selected to attend the upper-tier track were those who had been accepted into elite courses based on academic achievement and were designated to take



courses that led to professions. The students who had low achievement were guided to lower-tier courses. These schools provided mostly vocational training for low-skilled manual labor, so students had fewer if any opportunities to obtain professional jobs. The low-skilled manual labor curriculum was imposed on the general student population, and the number of low-tier graduates grew, encompassing the majority of high school graduates in the Chicago public school district (Neckerman, 2007). Subsequently, this practice led to the labor market being flooded by skilled labor. Schools responded to this phenomenon by creating a policy that further intensified stratification and restricted access to skilled vocational courses. To make matters worse, as stratification was imposed and segregation intensified, Black schools that were already banned from the upper-tier curriculum were further restricted from the skilled vocational tier.

The damage of the dual system was so profound on Black students that Herrick (1971), a Chicago school teacher, wrote, “By 1950 a low reading level meant continued failure in school, subsequent dropping out at sixteen, or getting an almost worthless diploma at eighteen. Such an education offered little chance even at a dead-end job, assuming one could be found by a Negro” (p. 306). By 1960, half of all public school students in Chicago were Black, their schools were very segregated and plagued with disinvestment, and “the system as a whole was characterized by bitter racial division” (Neckerman, 2007, p. viii). W.E.B. Dubois’s 1918 report on the state of public schools, *The Crisis*, shows the disparities in education provided to Black and White students:

What, now, is the real difference between these two schemes [white and black] of education? The difference is that .... For the white pupils, a chance is held open for the pupil to go through high school and college and to advance at the rate which the modern curriculum demands; that in the colored [black], a program is being made out that will

land the boy at the time he becomes self-conscious and aware of his own possibilities in an educational impasse. He cannot go on in the public schools even if he should move to a place where there are good public schools because he is too old. Even if he has done the elementary work in twice the time that a student is supposed to, it has been work of a kind that will not admit him to a northern high school. No matter, then, how gifted the boy may be, he is absolutely estopped from a higher education. This is not only unfair to the boy, but it is grossly unfair to the Negro race. (p. 263)

Thus, from a historical perspective schools in Chicago were designed specifically to exclude select children and educate students “explicitly” for the labor market (Price, Duffy, & Giordani, 2015). This practice clearly established a pervasive system of exclusion in the school district.

I believed that the historical account is crucial to the context of who “belongs” and the enduring inequality of urban schools. First, from the outset the two-tier program did not work well for Black students because of racial discrimination in the schools and the labor market (Neckerman, 2017). As it was, many Black students in Chicago Public schools during the early 1900 era were children of migrants from the South and therefore children of former slaves, sharecroppers, (“neo-slaves”) (Lemann 1991, Neckerman 2007). The term neo- slave is depicted in Blackmon’s (2009) work in response to forced labor of wrongfully imprisoned Black young men during the industrial revolution. I use it here as it is characterized by the afterglow of the slave emancipation as a testament of the progress of American Black life. It is the voice of millions of black people that is absent from the enormous amount of records. And as Blackmon explains, “Unlike the victims of the Holocaust, who were on the whole literate, comparatively wealthy, and positioned to record for history the horror that enveloped them. The black population of the United States in 1900 was in the main destitute and illiterate. For the vast

majority, no recordings, writings, images, or physical descriptions survive” (Blackmon 2009 p27) Therefore the silenced voices of the neo-slave put them at the bottom of the law and the social ladder. Consequently, as segregation intensified in the school district, Black students were concentrated in the lowest-tier schools. The fact was that the school district had a legacy of allocating less funding to Black schools, thereby initiating a lack of resources for effective practice, programs, and policy that impede the academic advancement of Black children. As Rousseau explained, the school board took advantage of the discrimination cycle that involved housing, education, and economic opportunity, and although it might not have been overtly complicit in the perpetuation of the cycle in the exact same manner as it was in 1908, the cycle continues and the dual system remains in place even today (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

### **Is Desegregation the Answer?**

Segregation was about providing opportunity for a select group and considerably less for another group. Moreover, as Bell pointed out, segregation was about maintaining White control of education (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Therefore, the implementation of desegregation further ensured that the social status of Whites was not disrupted in education. If one considers the interest convergence theory that Bell proposed (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006) and the legal and social history of Chicago as a contextual framework to truly understand “the world as it is rather than how we might want it” (Bell, 1995, p. 22, as cited in Dixson & Rousseau, 2006), then the idea of desegregation as a solution to inequality in education is an important factor. In fact, in Chicago minority and poor students who are admitted to the best schools achieve higher scores in the district than their affluent peers and are able to keep up with students in their school who are not minorities or low income (Quick, 2016). Desegregation is a powerful tool for equality. If it were not, then why do suburban White communities wall off their schools and prosecute

parents from other school districts who try to access them (Applebome, 2011)? In fact, according to Orfield (2013), most suburban communities do everything in their power to exclude people who are not affluent from living in their community and attending their neighborhood schools. “Desegregation can be powerful when it connects excluded students to opportunity that exist in better schools” (Orfield, 2013, p. 59). Integration theory does not just include a diverse student body; as Orfield (2013) emphasized, it is crucial to have an “integrated faculty, multicultural curriculum, and equal-status treatment in all school operations” (p. 59). This rarely happens by chance.

### **Integration Today**

Chicago’s African American population makes up about a quarter of the city. Today 85% of Chicago Public school students attend “racially identifiable” schools, which are defined as schools with a student population that is 85% or more Black and Latino. (See Appendix A). In the highest-performing Chicago public schools (also called magnet and selective enrollment schools), the African American population declined from 52 percent to 37.8 percent from the year 2000 to 2007. Because the federal government accused Chicago of supporting segregation, the school board entered into a consent decree with the United States Department of Justice over three decades ago, *United States of America v. Board of Education of the City of Chicago*, with the following objectives: first, desegregate schools; second, provide compensatory programming for schools remaining segregated; third, maximize the student population where integration occurs; and fourth, do not arbitrarily impose the burden of integration on any racial or ethnic group (Grossman et al., 2018; Quick, 2016). The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) was a Friend of the Court along with the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF). The ACLU noted that their primary concern included ensuring equality of resources

and access for minority students to magnet and higher-performing schools and further noted that over the past three decades the case provided “only limited substantive relief”(Grossman et al., 2018).

In 2009, a hearing was set to vacate the decree. The ACLU and MALDEF urged the court to maintain the decree until Chicago Public Schools provided the court a specific plan to ensure that minority students had equal access to magnet and selective enrollment schools. The school board issued a new admissions plan that primarily relied on socioeconomic status, not race. The ACLU served the school board with a Freedom of Information Act request to see how it intended to use race in the plan for admissions. The very first year without the decree in place, the number of minority students admitted to the magnet and selective enrollment schools significantly declined (Grossman et al., 2018).

Today, the very legislation that was passed in 1964 to ensure civil rights in education has since been reversed by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v Seattle School District No. 1* (the “PICS” case). In 2007, “the chief justice concluded that school segregation was no longer a problem and that doing anything aimed at integrating schools, even using a choice mechanism, violated the Constitution” (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013, p. 26). It is worth noting that the implementation of this policy is characterized by increasing segregation in major urban districts and has forbade integration plans of schools based on race. As such, disputes related to student achievement, segregation, re-segregation, and choice are shaping history.

Most Americans think that opportunity and choice is a basic human right for all Americans, yet this study revealed that this is not true. As Orfield (2013) pointed out, students are assigned to a public school rather than given the option to choose one of the best options

available. Schools are not created for the individual child but for groups. I am afraid that structural aspects in society that continue to limit opportunities to historically disadvantage groups coupled with current policy will further exclude African-American and Latino children from the best schools.

### **Future Research Recommendations**

The historical account of my education as an African American in Chicago was the focus of this research, and it spoke to positions of inquiry in the history of education. First, this research highlighted the forgotten voice of my urban education experience as a former African American student. Too often decisions are made about us without bringing us to the table. In addition, civil rights is often overlooked in this time of school choice, and I believe this research gives the reader clear evidence to assess the civil rights implications of choice and equity (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013).

The purpose of this essay is to provide a historical background of Chicago's restrictive housing policy and the subsequent development and maintenance of segregated schools. Then, by exploring the tenets of critical race theory, I analyze how education policy is related to race by examining research in regard to the inferior education of African Americans and people of color in the United States. I reference a historical, documented account of local and federal governments openly supporting housing segregation in Chicago. Then I detail the school board policy of imposing segregation and a dual-curriculum system that was design to select and exclude students from a high tier curriculum. Finally, I use my personal lived experiences, via an autoethnography, to expound on how my education intersected with the policies and economics of the time. Based on this study's findings and other literature, I make the following recommendations: 1) A follow-up qualitative study regarding CPS magnet and selective

enrollment schools' admission of Black and Latino students under the current Socio-Economic Status Plan since the federal consent decree was vacated in 2009. 2) A study comparing the academic performance of culturally segregated schools that focus on culturally relevant pedagogy as a curriculum framework taught by teachers reflective of the cultural compared to segregated public schools that do not use a culturally relevant curriculum framework. 3) A study that further examines the Latino experience in the Chicago Public School system as it relates to segregation and race.

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